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MARGARET, WITH AN EXPRESSION OF HORROR AND REPROACH UPON HER FACE, DIRECTED PHILIP MARGRAVE TO THE DOOR.

A BRAVE ATONEMENT.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A SENSE of some important and exciting event shortly to occur seemed to pervade Doctor Vaughan's usually quiet and well-regulated household, while the various members of his large family, from the careworn, fair-faced matron to the youngest children, Willie and Herbert, better known in their own domestic circle as "the imps," since they were always in mischief, were in a state of constant activity from morning till night.

Margaret, Dr. Vaughan's eldest daughter, was to be married on the morrow, and the pleasant stir and commotion that attend the preparations for a wedding served to upset all ordinary routine for the time being, and to drive the Doctor into the safe shelter of his surgery, since that was the only place where he was not likely

to be disturbed while taking his time-honoured afternoon nap.

Mrs. Vaughan—never a very strong woman at the best of times—was beginning to feel tired and worn out as the day advanced, leaving so much still to be done. The younger branches, however, free from all care or responsibility, enjoyed the fun and bustle; the trying on of new dresses, the constant ringing at the front door, the arrival of late presents, and the ordinary preparations going on in the kitchen to their hearts' content. Important events at Dullborough were as scarce as angels' visits, and the young Vaughans meant to extract as much enjoyment for themselves from the treat in store as they possibly could.

All other things being fairly en train Mrs. Vaughan went upstairs to pack Margaret's trunks in readiness for the morrow. Some tears fell among the carefully-folded garments and dainty little furbelows as she did so; for Margaret was her confidant, her favourite child to whom she had always looked for help in any home trouble or emergency; and the approaching separation between them grieved her to the heart, although she was too brave and

unselfish to make a display of her deeply-rooted sorrow.

"If it had only been Philip Margrave," she said to herself, as she fastened the last trunk. "Archie, poor fellow, is a true gentleman; he has plenty of talent, and I know that he will make my darling a good husband, but his want of money is so terribly against him. They will have only a struggling, uncertain kind of existence to look forward to for many years, unless Archie makes a name for himself as a painter before then. Well, there is no help for it now, but I always hoped that my Margaret might never know anything of the care and anxiety that attend a limited income on her own account. Philip would have given her every luxury that heart could wish for, not taking the title that will one day be his into account, and yet she set her face steadily against him from the first. At least her choice speaks well for the unworldliness of her nature."

Margaret Vaughan had indeed shown herself to be singularly free from ambition or worldly motives of any kind, since she had refused to accept the offer of marriage made to her by Philip Margrave, the only son of Sir Percival

Margrave, a neighbouring landowner with an immense fortune, in order that she might become the wife of Archie Lawrence, a young painter, who possessed little beyond what he was able to earn by means of his palette and brush.

At one time the Vaughans had entertained hopes that Margaret would one day be induced to accept Philip Margrave, although she never held out the least encouragement to him. Her heart then had at least been free, and Philip, who was deeply in love with her, did all in his power to surmount her indifference by unceasing attentions and earnest, passionate pleadings, rendered from time to time as his desire to win her for his bride grew yet stronger upon him.

But he had never succeeded in winning love from her, and then Archie Lawrence had appeared upon the scene to render his cause yet more hopeless. Margaret and the young painter had fallen in love with each other soon after their first meeting, the latter's stay at Dullborough being lengthened out beyond all reasonable limits, and before he left it he had obtained Dr. Vaughan's somewhat reluctant consent to their engagement.

It was only natural that the Doctor and his wife should feel disappointed at the choice made by their eldest daughter. They were poor, and they had a large family; the struggle to keep up appearances was often a very difficult one, and a wealthy son-in-law would have been a perfect god-send to them. But they were kind, unselfish parents, and they would not allow worldly interests to stand in the way of their daughter's happiness. They had made a love match themselves in the years gone by, and in spite of many cares and many children, some of the old fondness for each other still lived in their hearts, and enabled them in a measure to understand and sympathise with Margaret's choice.

So, with some regret, the engagement had been formally acknowledged, and now at the expiration of a year the wedding was about to take place. Archie Lawrence had taken a pretty little house at Richmond, close to the river, and furnished it in readiness for his bride. Nature had dowered them both very liberally with youth, health, and good looks. Only the gifts of fortune were lacking to them, and they had laid in a large stock of hope to atone for this deficiency.

Philip Margrave had taken his disappointment in very bad part. He had been away from home during the painter's first visit to Dullborough, and his anger on discovering what a good innings a rival had made in the meanwhile was intense. His passionate reproaches and urgent endeavours to change her decision had fairly frightened Margaret, and rendered it necessary for Dr. Vaughan to speak sternly to him, and forbid him the house for the time being until he should have gained a little more self-control. He had then left Dullborough for several months, and the two men had never happened to come in contact with each other.

Mrs. Vaughan had finished her packing when the bride-elect entered the room with a torn copy of "Bradshaw" in her hand, and a perplexed expression on her pretty face.

"Mother, dear, the boys have torn nearly all the leaves out of 'Bradshaw' to make tails for their kite," she said laughingly; "and I can't find out at what time Archie's train will arrive this evening. I wonder if we could borrow one for a little while?"

Margaret Vaughan was a girl of twenty, with a slender, *petite* figure. Her features, if somewhat irregular, were yet pretty and full of expression; her eyes were "darkly, deeply, beautifully blue"; while her wavy, golden-brown hair hung down to her waist in a thick mass of curls, loosely tied back by a broad ribbon.

Anyone skilled in reading the human character from its index, the face, would at once have perceived that pride and ambition were forces of which Margaret Vaughan knew little or nothing. The deft security and happiness of home life, and the joys of wife and mother would be all in all to her, and she would never seek for anything beyond them.

She was in a very April like mood at present,

ready to play wild games with "the imps" at one moment, and to melt into tears the next, for the morrow would witness her first separation from the home of her childhood, and, after all, there is no love that can equal a mother's in constancy and patient self-sacrifice.

"I dare say the Gregorvys will lend us their 'Bradshaw,' if I send Willie in for it. We must know what time the train gets in on account of having supper all ready," said Mrs. Vaughan. "And there is so much still to be done, I hardly know how we are to get through it before he comes. While you tack the cambric frilling in the girls' dresses, Margaret, I will finish arranging the tables in the dining-room. Leah must come and help me; Leah, child, where are you? You must not keep running away when we are all so busy."

Leah came slowly downstairs in obedience to her mother's summons.

She was Dr. Vaughan's second daughter, but not the faintest personal resemblance existed between the two sisters.

Leah was a thin, tall girl of seventeen, with an unformed figure, an obese complexion, great solemn, dark eyes, with long, fringing lashes, and a quantity of soft, dark hair, knotted up untidily at the back of her small head.

Her old, sage-green dress and the knot of scarlet ribbon at her throat toned in well with her dark southern face, upon which a stormy expression of repressed grief or anger rested at the present moment.

But the others were much too busy to pay any attention to Leah, or to remark the absence of all gladness or excitement from her manner.

She was only a raw girl recently emancipated from the schoolroom, not of any particular importance in the family circle as yet, and her ever-varying moods and strange, uncertain temper excited but little notice from those around her.

She helped to set out the tables for the wedding breakfast, while her deft, skilful, brown fingers arranged fruit and flowers with artistic ease and gracefulness.

She went to and fro at her mother's bidding like a swift, noiseless automaton more than a living, breathing girl.

When there was nothing more for her to do she went upstairs again to her own little room, thankful to be released.

Once there, with the door securely locked against all intruders, her frigid self-control suddenly vanished, and she threw herself upon the floor in a paroxysm of passionate, unrestrained grief, while her slight form quivered beneath the deep, choking sobs that broke from her as she lay there.

"Oh, my love, my love, they are all so full of their own happiness they care nothing for what you may be made to suffer!" she cried, brokenly. "Oh, Philip! Margaret gets everything, even your love, and it seems so hard she should have that when she does not even want it, and I would give my life could I but gain it. He must be feeling so miserable now," she continued, wearily, "and yet I can do nothing to help or comfort him, since he does not care for me. All his love is given to Margaret, who can turn from him so coldly to marry Archie Lawrence instead. Life is full of cross-purposes and sad, pitiful mysteries that no one can unravel."

Her sobs became gradually fainter as the passion-fit wore itself out.

Presently she rose from off the floor, and going to the window pressed her sorrowful, tear-stained young face against the glass, while her mind was still occupied with wistful, yearning thoughts of Philip Margrave.

Unknown to anyone but herself, Leah had fallen deeply in love with her sister's rejected suitor.

Philip Margrave had seldom deigned to notice her when visiting at the Vaughans' house in days gone by. She was but a child in his eyes, and he had always treated her as such.

But Leah possessed the passionate southern temperament that ripens so quickly into maturity; and in her love for Philip Margrave she had passed from childhood to womanhood with scarcely any intermediate stage.

It was no mere schoolgirl feeling that he had unconsciously awoke within her breast, but a strong, deeply-rooted attachment that would cease to exist only with life itself.

While Leah was thus suffering in the solitude of her own room the work of preparation was going on briskly down below.

Mrs. Vaughan—the tables being laid in readiness for the wedding breakfast—was in the act of locking the dining-room door to prevent "the imps" from making a descent upon the various good things arranged therein, when it came to her mind that she had neglected to get some lace-bordered paper that would be required on the morrow.

"I will go down to the library and fetch some," said Margaret, willingly. "I shall not be long away."

"I would send one of the servants only they are both busy," replied Mrs. Vaughan, dubiously. "I don't like you to go, Margaret, since it will soon be dark. It was very foolish of me to forget the paper this morning."

"Oh, I shall be back before the daylight is quite gone," said Margaret, reassuringly. "It will be my last trip into Dullborough for some time to come, you know."

She went to the library, and then having obtained the required article, she walked quickly back in the direction of home.

Winchelsea-crescent, where the Vaughans lived, stood on the outskirts of the town, and a rather lonely piece of road had to be traversed before reaching it.

Margaret had nearly arrived at the end of this road when a tall form came suddenly towards her through the fast falling darkness, and Philip Margrave stood once more beside her.

He was a largely-built, handsome man, with light hair and complexion, grey eyes, and faultlessly regular features. But the expression on his set, determined face was not pleasant to behold as he bent down to address the frightened girl beside him.

"Margaret, I saw you go out just now," he began, without any kind of preliminary, "and I resolved to await your return, and to make a last appeal to you before your contemplated marriage really takes place. Have you no pity for me that you refuse to become my wife, and do your best to madden me by thrusting the love I have so frequently implored you to accept back upon the giver?"

"I think that it is both wrong and cowardly of you to waylay and address me in such an unpardonable manner!" Margaret replied, feeling sorry for Philip Margrave and angry with him at the same time. "You would not do it if my father were here to protect me. I never buoyed you up with any false hopes, Philip; and your own good sense might surely tell you that words similar to those you have just uttered are ill-timed and useless in the extreme."

"Why useless?" he inquired, with agitation, pitiful to behold. "Margaret, my love, even now it is not too late for you to alter your mind, and to become my wife instead of Lawrence's. The world would soon forgive us, since it is always ready to pardon the rich and successful. Darling, think of what I have it in my power to bestow upon you—what a cherished, idolised existence yours would be were you but to link your life with mine, and then—"

"Silence, sir! I will not listen to you any longer!" cried Margaret, her gentle nature roused to an unusual pitch of indignation. "Each word you utter is an insult to me and the man I am about to marry. I have never liked you, and I would sooner marry Archie Lawrence if he had not a penny in the world, than I would become your wife if you were as rich as Croesus. After this plain declaration on my part you will surely cease to annoy me."

"Yes, I will leave you now, since you have done your best to spoil my life for me," Philip Margrave replied, as he drew himself up proudly, while the evil expression on his face grew yet deeper; "but the suffering I have endured at your hands shall yet be paid back with compound interest. But for the arrival of that cursed painter you would ere this have been my wife. I shall not forget what he has robbed me of, and

you and your husband that is to be will live to repent the day when you first aroused my anger. I will spoil his triumph, if it takes me half a lifetime to do it."

With these words he left her, and Margaret almost flew over the remainder of the road in her desire to reach the safe shelter of home.

Archie Lawrence's speedy arrival, however, served to drive all unpleasant thoughts from her mind for the time being.

If the young painter was less handsome than Philip Margrave, intellect and inherent nobility of disposition served in his case to atone for the want of mere physical perfection of form and feature.

It was a very gay little party that met round Dr. Vaughan's table that night.

For them the river of life flowed on smoothly and swiftly, with ripples of hope and happiness on its surface, while Leah's almost hopeless love, and Philip Margrave's bitter disappointment formed the dark, silent undercurrent gliding beneath it.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Margaret's wedding had become a thing of the past, and Dr. Vaughan's household had settled down again into the quiet monotonous routine of daily life in the country, Leah became strangely restless and dissatisfied with her surroundings.

The peaceful home-life, the round of little duties and simple pleasures that had always satisfied Margaret, only served to fret and irritate the more impatient and ambitious spirit of Leah.

She had never cared much for them, she had frequently longed to be translated to some more congenial sphere, since her nervous, imaginative nature craved instinctively for pleasure and variety.

But the longing had always been suppressed as a thing impossible to be realized. Now it had come back to her again with fresh force, and the additional stimulus of an aching heart and a love that met with no return, although she was just as ill able to gratify it as in the days gone by.

She positively hated Dullborough, with its familiar streets and faces, while even the painful pleasure of occasionally seeing or speaking to Philip Margrave was denied to her, since he had left Dullborough, soon after Margaret's marriage, in order to join a party of young men who were going up the Nile on a pleasure trip.

The latent ambition in Leah's nature began to develop itself at this time very rapidly. Margaret, under a love wound, would, in all probability, have pined and died; Leah, on the other hand, sought in her fiery, imperious manner to find a substitute for love—something that would deaden the pain at her heart, and create fresh interests and—if possible—fresh joys in her life.

At this critical period ambition came to her aid; it took the place that love had left vacant, and whispered to her of a fair, golden future, of great triumphs and dazzling possibilities yet to be achieved, till the girl's heart thrilled beneath the influence of its own tender passionate day-dreams.

For Leah possessed histrionic talent of the highest order, and a proper course of training alone was required to render her a finished actress. Whenever any private theatricals took place in the vicinity of Dullborough, Leah was always in request to take the principal part, and to drill the other and less competent amateurs into something like proficiency.

Her natural instincts all tended strongly in the direction of the stage, and many a time had she rehearsed her favourite characters up in the lumber-room to no other audience than an astonished mouse or two. The comprehensive glow and fervour she displayed in so doing would have delighted the heart of a stage manager, could he but have beheld the young aspirant to dramatic honours.

Leah was aware of the existence of this buried talent—for buried it really was, to all intents and purposes, in such a place as Dullborough. Certain vague longings to have it recognized and acknow-

ledged by the world had frequently possessed her, although they had never taken any definite form.

Now that heart and mind were both so restless and ill at ease, the old desire for an enlarged sphere of action had come back to her with renewed strength; she yearned to do great things, only the way was still wanting.

One night, however, after some private theatricals had taken place at the house of a neighbour, and Leah had, as usual, been loudly applauded, she chanced to overhear part of a conversation that was being carried on between her father and one of the other guests, an elderly lady, by no means lacking in shrewd worldly wisdom.

"My dear sir, your daughter is an *artiste*!" she exclaimed, with genuine admiration. "She ought not to remain content with being merely an amateur actress. Talent like hers would quickly be recognised and make its way upon the stage. A quiet domestic life will, I am certain, fail to satisfy such a gifted, passionate nature. Were she my daughter I should place no hindrances in the way of her accepting the stage as her profession!"

"Leah, an actress! Bless my soul, I couldn't think of such a thing! I wouldn't permit it," said good Dr. Vaughan, who, in common with many other respectable middle-class people, entertained the mistaken idea that it was extremely derogatory to be in any way connected with the stage.

"Why not?" inquired his more sensible companion, warmly; "it is a noble profession, and those who stand at the head of it are respected and received on equal terms by people of the highest rank. It contains some black sheep, I admit, but so do all other professions, and it would be hard indeed to visit their shortcomings upon the many who lead useful and blameless lives."

The conversation then took another turn, and Leah listened to it no longer. But her vague longings had suddenly taken definite shape, and life had ceased to appear dull and purposeless in her eyes.

She would be an actress, she would go on the boards, not as an amateur, but as a professional, willing to accept the world's opinion as to the talent she was supposed to possess. The fuel had long been ready, and it only needed the spark contained in the words already described to make the fire of ambition burn brightly in Leah's breast.

That very night, on their return home, she acquainted her father with her desire to become an actress, and besought him in earnest, pleading words that startled Dr. Vaughan considerably, coming as they did from shy, proud Leah, to give his consent to the same.

For a time he flatly refused to do so, since both to his wife and himself the idea of their daughter making an appearance upon the public stage was distasteful in the extreme.

Moved, however, by Leah's entreaties and fits of weeping, conscious that she was by no means happy in her home life, that her hopes and aims differed widely from those of their other children, and perhaps a little influenced by the fact that several persons, whose social position came far before their own, had lately "taken to" the stage, Leah's father and mother at length gave a reluctant consent to her request. She was declared free to tread the boards, since all her talent and ambition pointed in that direction.

Accompanied by her father, she went to London in order that she might undergo a strict examination as to her merits at the hands of an individual well-known in theatrical circles, who had trained and instructed some of the leading actresses of the day.

Somewhat to Dr. Vaughan's disappointment, Leah emerged from the ordeal with flying colours. Andrew Ashmead not only offered to take her as his pupil, but he volunteered to board and lodge her as well for the two years that must elapse ere she would be qualified to appear upon the stage in any character of importance.

In return for all the expense and trouble

thus incurred, he reserved to himself the privilege of forming her engagements at the end of that time, and sharing any salary, large or small, that she might earn, equally between them.

After a great many inquiries had been made, and satisfactory references had been given and exchanged, Dr. Vaughan consented to accept these terms on Leah's behalf, and to leave his daughter in the care of Mrs. Ashmead, a ladylike, delicate woman, who had no children of her own, and who gave a warm welcome to her husband's pupil.

A formal agreement rendered binding upon both the contracting parties was drawn up. Then Dr. Vaughan returned to Dullborough, and Leah commenced her new life under the assumed name of Pauline Mowbray, since, in deference to the wishes of her family, she would not allow her real name to transpire in any matters connected with the stage.

Plenty of hard work, and very little pleasure awaited her at the onset. But the work was to her liking, and Andrew Ashmead had no occasion to urge upon his pupil the need for constant and unremitting study. On the other hand he had sometimes to remonstrate with her for tasking herself so heavily. Prolonged rehearsals, hard reading, wearisome technicalities, and difficult stage business, without a good knowledge of which the most talented actress would fail to win public approval, had to be gone through and mastered by degrees.

Ashmead prided himself greatly upon his pupil's rapid progress, and the inherent power, the inborn talent, that developed more and more under skilful tuition.

Sometimes, at the theatre with which he was connected, Leah went upon the stage in some minor part, just to accustom her to the surroundings, and the steady, concentrated gaze of many people. But her *début* was not really to take place until the end of the second year, and meanwhile Leah worked unceasingly, in order to render it a success.

A great hope sustained her during the period of probation, and served to render it full of keen purpose and interest. If the power was really in her to become a famous actress, might not Philip Margrave be drawn among others, to the theatre to admire or decry the acting of the newly risen star.

That first love of his must be growing faint and shadowy now, she told herself hopefully. Some other flame might, alas! have already replaced it. But, if such was not the case, Leah secretly determined to exert every force in her gifted nature to win him for her own, and to gain his love in return for that which he had all unconsciously possessed for several years past, namely, the strong unquenchable love of her own heart.

But they were destined to meet before the much coveted fame had fallen to Leah's share.

Not in the crowded theatre, but in the drawing-room of a lady friend of Dr. Vaughan's who had invited the girl to spend as much time with her as she could spare from her studies, did Leah and Philip Margrave, now Sir Philip, owing to the death of his father, meet again.

"I've got another visitor coming presently," said Frank, dark-eyed little Mrs. Seymour, as she sat by the fire one duly afternoon, shading her face from the blaze with a feathery hand-screen, while Leah knelt upon the hearthrug, her dark eyes gazing dreamily into the glowing coals. "I hope he won't be much longer, for I want my cup of tea very badly indeed. You ought to know him, Leah, for his country seat is in the vicinity of Dullborough. Sir Philip Margrave is my ideal of a really nice young man—neither fast nor priggish, with plenty of self-possession and *savoir vivre*. I am always glad to see him, and I'm quite sure that you—"

But Leah put a stop to any further remarks by springing up abruptly from the hearth-rug, as a vigorous hand plied the knocker, and the bell rang loudly.

"Dear Mrs. Seymour," she cried, eagerly, "if Sir Philip should fail to recognise me at once, please do not betray me to him. Introduce me by my stage name—not my real one. I have not seen him for years, and he is by no means

likely to remember the shy, sullen Leah Vaughan of days gone by. Let us bury her for the present, and bring Pauline Mowbray to the front instead. For several reasons I do not wish to reveal myself to him as Dr. Vaughan's daughter."

"Very well," said Mrs. Seymour with an amused smile, "you are too sensitive by half about your profession, my dear, but your wish shall be regarded. We will have a little farce all to ourselves, and pass you off to Sir Philip as Miss Mowbray, a young lady he has never had the pleasure of meeting before to-day."

The words were scarcely uttered ere the manservant announced Sir Philip Margrave, and Leah with calm face, but rapidly beating heart, found herself once more in the presence of Margaret's old lover, and the object of her own pure deeply rooted affection.

Sir Philip came forward to greet his hostess, wondering, as he did so, who the strangely beautiful girl standing beside her might be.

Exposure to the sun had bronzed his fair face, and he had grown a thick, tawny moustache. But for these trifling alterations he was the same perfectly dressed, easy-mannered insouciant Philip Margrave of old.

"This is Miss Mowbray, Sir Philip," said Mrs. Seymour, indicating Leah as she spoke, with a wave of the feathery fan. "She is kind enough to come and cheer me up a little sometimes when I am tired of my own society. And this kindness on her part is rendered more valuable, since she has so little time at her disposal."

"Lady clerk or governess, I suppose," he remarked mentally, as he bowed to her none the less courteously on that account. "A splendid girl, no matter what her occupation may be. I thought a lady always had so much time at her disposal," he added aloud, "that she was compelled to work it up as it were, into slippers and smoking-caps. But these days of high pressure and competitive examinations alter everything. Every day sees some old idea shelved and a new one put into its place."

"Pray do not imagine that I am going in for anything half so intellectual as a competitive examination," Leah replied, with a musical laugh. "I am in training for the stage."

"Indeed!" he observed, looking at her with fresh interest and admiration. "Then, in that case, your intellect will have a far wider scope, and your choice of a profession demands no apology."

"Have you been to Dulborough lately?" inquired Mrs. Seymour, wickedly trying to arouse Leah's alarm, lest her identity should be revealed to the baronet.

"Well, no. I ought to be there now," he replied penitently. "Lots of things connected with the estate want looking into, but it is such a wretched hole, from a society point of view, that I shirk going there as much as I possibly can. The Vaughans and the rectory people are almost the only civilized beings in the neighbourhood."

"Who are the Vaughans?" inquired Leah, demurely, a spirit of wild daring coming over her as she spoke. She would not allow herself to be out-witted by Mrs. Seymour.

"Oh, they are the doctor's family," he said, frankly; "very nice people, but poor, awfully poor."

"I used to know some of the daughters," continued Mrs. Seymour, coming to Leah's rescue, as Philip dealt her this unconscious stab. "Are any of them married yet, Sir Philip?"

"I believe the eldest girl, Margaret, was married to a painter named Lawrence nearly two years ago," replied the young baronet. The tone in which he delivered this piece of information was so cool and matter-of-fact that Leah inwardly rejoiced as she heard it. Surely no man could thus allude to a woman for whom he still entertained either love or liking!

"Then there was another daughter, Leah," said Mrs. Seymour, still bent on mischief; "what has become of her, Sir Philip?"

"I really don't know!" he rejoined with genuine indifference. "She was a tall, plain, awkward-looking girl when I last saw her. I dare say they have married her to some local magnate before now."

Mrs. Seymour fanned herself vigorously in a

desperate effort to conceal the smile his words had given rise to, while Leah felt both amused and relieved.

Philip Margrave was by no means likely to recognize in Pauline Mowbray the tall, plain, awkward-looking girl he had once known under the name of Leah Vaughan. For the ugly duckling of the family had, during his absence, blossomed into superb queenly womanhood. Her tall, graceful form owned the true poetry of motion, her lustrous dark eyes gave light and expression to the delicate clear cut face, with its olive complexion, while the soft dark hair that had once formed her only beauty was skillfully arranged to form a natural diadem round the small firmly-poised head.

The trio in Mrs. Seymour's drawing-room chatted together for nearly an hour, all sorts of topics blending themselves in with the conversation. Before he took his leave Sir Philip Margrave had contrived to extract from Leah the fact of her approaching *début*, while he had announced his intention of being present at the same. In one sense of the word her triumph had already commenced.

CHAPTER III.

A MODERATE share of success attended Archie Lawrence's artistic career for a year or two after his marriage with Margaret Vaughan.

Turning his back with a sigh of regret upon the heroic school of painting that he loved so well, although it had always proved unremunerative to him, he devoted himself chiefly to the production of "pot-boilers" and simple domestic scenes, since the dealers were, as a rule, willing to take pictures of this kind off his hands as soon as finished, the general public preferring them to art of a higher kind.

The price paid for them was a very modest one, it is true, but by working constantly at his easel Archie could earn enough to keep his head above water, and prevent dull care from taking up its abode in the pretty little home at Richmond; and his young wife—already a good housekeeper, thanks to her mother's careful tuition—raked out their little income, as he laughingly declared, in a manner that was simply marvellous, and which bordered closely upon witchcraft.

But there were times when he could not content himself with the good but, for him, inferior work by which he earned their daily bread—times when the genius inherent within him boldly asserted its right to be heard, and made him unhappy by revealing to him that he was not doing justice to himself, or his art, while he produced nothing beyond the despised "pot-boilers."

Margaret began to dread these fits of despondency, and she did all in her power to dispel them by means of loving, hopeful words of encouragement when they overshadowed her husband; but she could not always check or hinder them from taking their course.

The "pot-boilers" would be thrown contemptuously aside for a while, and some large, partly-finished picture, full of real merit, but quite unsaleable from a picture-dealer's point of view, would take their place on the easel.

Then ensued the inevitable disappointment, and the picture that no one would purchase had to be turned with its face to the wall, like a child in disgrace, to make room once more for the "pot-boilers," when the young painter's stock of ready money began to run short.

The Academy, too, did not favour him any more than the outside world.

Other men might succeed in getting their works skied, floored, or safely hung upon the line; his pictures usually came back to him again like bad pennies, he sometimes remarked, with a sad smile.

Patience is a rare virtue in a man, but Archie Lawrence had an unusual share of it, and his despised works of art would be set aside with hardly a word of complaint; while Margaret, moved to unusual indignation, said severe things about the want of discernment evinced by the hanging committee, and proved herself generally to be a most partial critic.

But if a cloud sometimes hung over their little household, sunshine generally predominated.

Love, the great enhancer, lived there, and his transforming power is well known to be boundless; it can make poverty fair to look upon, and bring a smile to the lips of care.

Lawrence and his wife were too young for any ordinary trouble to depress them long at a time; youth, hope, and good spirits generally won the victory, and a day that threatened to be gloomy and dark in the morning not unfrequently wound up with a pleasant evening spent on the river, or a gay little party of Archie's Bohemian acquaintances, clever, thriftless, delightful people, with hearts as light as their pockets, since the true Bohemian so long as he can proudly lay claim to a shilling will turn down any lane that presents itself in order to avoid meeting trouble face to face.

A new joy came into Margaret's gentle life when her boy was born. He proved to be a fair round-limbed, happy-tempered child, with his father's great, dreamy brown eyes, and his mother's wavy, golden-brown hair.

With husband and child to love and care for, Margaret's cup of blameless happiness grew brimming full, and she asked for nothing more. Lawrence, too, was very proud of his boy. He sketched him in every possible attitude; and he was never tired of watching little Archie as he sat on the lawn trying to weave the daisies into chains with his chubby, dimpled fingers, or ran to meet his young mother with a cry of joy, eager to rain a shower of warm, sweet kisses from rosebud lips upon her face when she raised him in her arms.

The childish voice made music in their home, and gladdened their hearts, even while it gave Lawrence an additional sense of responsibility, and spurred him on to work yet more vigorously, since he had given such precious hostages to fortune.

Leah was frequently to be found at Richmond. She was very fond of Margaret, although their natures differed so widely, and she had too much good sense and generosity to entertain any feelings of anger or resentment because her sister had succeeded in winning the love of Philip Margrave—a treasure that she would fain have called her own.

Leah knew quite well that Margaret had made not the faintest effort to obtain what to her was but a useless triumph, since she had flatly refused to become Philip's wife when once her heart had passed into the keeping of Archie Lawrence. Her refusal, had thus left the field open to Leah, who had resolved to strain every nerve in the effort to win first the admiration and then the love of the man who, all unconsciously, had served to influence her life, and develop her true character.

Leah's passionate, highly-strung nature delighted in vivid contrasts. The Lawrences' peaceful home life possessed a charm for her, since it stood out in such relief from the constant whirl of excitement and anticipation that distinguished her own, and which became intensified as the time for her first appearance upon the stage drew nigh.

Her Sundays were frequently spent at Richmond; while Margaret's boy, to whom she was godmother as well as aunt, always hailed her arrival with delight. Her quick, vivacious manner and dark, luxuriant, tropical beauty, had a peculiar fascination for him. He was pleased to give her a high place in his favour, and in return Leah loaded him with toys and presents of every kind, while she looked with jealous eyes upon any rival candidate for the petted, cherished darling's affection.

Both the painter and his wife took a keen interest in Leah's welfare and her professional progress. They contrived to exert a considerable amount of influence for good over her willful, impulsive nature, and her approaching *début* was looked forward to by them with a feeling of mingled pleasure and anxiety.

They knew nothing, however, of the meeting that had taken place between Leah and Sir Philip Margrave, when, owing to her changed name and appearance, he had completely failed to recognise her as Margaret Vaughan's sister. Leah had not mentioned it to them. Although

as a rule, she was frank and communicative respecting her own affairs, she could be very reticent when anything thus deeply affected her happiness was in question.

Matters had progressed thus far all round when Archie Lawrence, standing in the middle of his little studio, threw down his brush, at the close of a day's hard, unremitting work, and declared that he would paint no more until the next morning.

"Put the boy to bed, Maggie," he said to his wife, who sat near him embroidering a dainty little frock, "and then get ready for a row on the river. There will be a glorious sunset by-and-by, and I am in good rowing condition to-night. After being cramped up in this bandbox of a room all day I feel as if I could row or walk miles without once stopping."

So Margaret laid aside her work and went upstairs to put little Archie to bed—a labour of love that was never by any chance delegated to their one servant. But the putting him to bed was one thing, the getting him off to sleep when there was another. Margaret had a splendid contralto voice, and she usually sang the young tyrant to sleep, but to-night he happened to be more wide-awake than ever, and a great many favourite tunes had to be gone through before he floated away into the pleasant dreamland of childish slumber.

Nearly an hour had elapsed before she went down to join her husband, who, cigar in mouth, was waiting for her at the door.

"Well, little woman," he remarked, good-humouredly; "if I were not as patient as Job, I should growl at having to wait all this time for you while young Scaramouch is being persuaded to go to sleep. If we don't make haste we shall lose the sunset."

"I know I have treated you shamefully in being so long," she replied, with a smile; "but he was very restless, and I had to slug him to sleep."

"Well, if he expects you to go half way through *Hymns Ancient and Modern* with him every night, I suppose there is no help for it," said Lawrence, with an air of calm resignation. "He generally gets his own way in everything. Get in, Maggie, and take the steering rope; the oars are under the seat. This is indeed delightful after the heat and burden of the day."

He had pushed the boat off from the shore, and they were floating gently down the river. The cool evening breeze blew in their faces; the purple and golden glory of the sunset steeped sky, earth, and water, in rich melting loveliness while the musical ripples of the water, or the faint chirp of some sleepy bird, alone broke the sweet solemn stillness that heralds the approach of night.

"If one could only put a scene like this upon canvas," said the painter, with a smile as he bared his head to the pleasant breeze, "our efforts are but sorry daubs when compared with Nature's majestic handiwork."

"It is almost too lovely," Margaret replied, with a look of intense happiness shining in her clear blue eyes as she spoke; "and yet some people say that it is a bad world, full of cold, selfish, or revengeful beings. They must surely be guilty of exaggeration, since the world is so fair, and even the worst men and women are not without their redeeming virtues."

"Your experience of the world and human nature is rather a limited one, Maggie," her husband remarked, with an air of grave amusement. "I hope from my heart that nothing will ever occur to make you regard either from a less favourable point of view. Those coloured theories, as a rule, are not—"

But a cry of alarm from Margaret interrupted him at this moment, as a boat, much larger than their own, came swiftly towards them; while the rowers, who had evidently dined all too freely, narrowly escaped upsetting the smaller craft, upon which they bore down without any attempt to alter their reckless course.

A few vigorous strokes placed Lawrence and his wife in safety, although their frail boat rocked perilously for a while, and the painter grew white with anger as he recognized the need-

less alarm and danger to which his wife had been exposed.

"The clumsy idiots!" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "I believe they were all the worse for drink. Do you know that fellow who bowed to you as their boat shot by ours, Maggie?"

"Yes. It was Sir Philip Margrave," she replied, falteringly. "Did you ever see such a stern, cruel face as his, Archie? It may be foolish, but I am almost afraid of him. I fancy that if it lay in his power to do so, he would injure us in some way, even now."

"Nonsense, you dear little goose," said Archie, recovering his equanimity, as he pulled rapidly in the direction of home. "What harm could Sir Philip contrive to do to us, even if he wished—like a stage villain—to punish me for winning the treasure he once sought to obtain for himself. I can almost find it in my heart to pity the poor beggar when I think of the loss he has sustained, but they need not have given us quite such a narrow shave. Since you are tired and inclined to be nervous, Maggie, respecting your old lover, we had better make for the shore."

They landed almost in silence, for Margaret, although she refrained from putting her fears into words again, could not shake off the strange, unreasonable dread of Philip Margrave that had taken possession of her. She had noticed the look of intense repressed hatred with which he had regarded her husband as their boats passed each other, and the ironical courtesy that had distinguished his salutation.

A chill feeling of approaching evil crept over her as she remembered his passionate words uttered on the eve of her wedding-day.

"You and your husband that is to be will both live to repent the day when you first aroused the anger of Philip Margrave. I have lost you, it is true, but I will spoil his triumph if it takes me half a lifetime to do it!"

She tried to dismiss the fear he had awakened within her breast by reflecting that it was quite out of his power to injure either herself or her husband. But reason cannot always supersede feeling and intuition, and the fear still haunted her when the river was fairly out of sight, and they were safe within the shelter of their own home.

The evening post had brought a letter from the painter during his absence, and its contents proved to be the reverse of satisfactory. A picture that he had fully expected to dispose of on advantageous terms was about to be returned to him again, since it had failed to meet with approval. Several others had shared the same fate lately, and the disappointment was thus rendered more intense.

Margaret strove to cheer and console her husband as the deponent look that pained her so deeply clouded his face, and robbed it of all its recent gladness. But the meeting with Philip Margrave and the arrival of the ill-omened letter had served to damp her own spirits, while the indefinite mysterious sense of coming evil came back to her with fresh force, and filled her heart with vague, nameless terror.

CHAPTER IV.

It was one o'clock in the morning, but the wax-lights on Lesh Vaughan's dressing-table still burned brightly, while Lesh herself stood in front of the cheval glass brushing the soft dusky hair that well-nigh shrouded her tall, slender form, and fell in rippling waves to her small, satin-slipped feet.

She was feeling too intensely happy, too full of excitement for sleep to visit her eyes yet awhile. For her the great crisis that stamps a lifetime was just over, the rubicon had been safely passed, and triumph, full and overwhelming, had awaited her on the other side. In other words, she had that night made her first appearance upon the stage in an important character, and success had crowned the combined efforts of her inherent genius and long, patient study.

Lesh possessed the true artist nature which enables its owner to merge his or her own indi-

viduality for the time being in that of the character portrayed, and to bring each hidden thought, feeling, and motive to the surface.

It requires no little courage to give a bold and original conception of a world-known character, the manner of delineating which has become stereotyped. Such an attempt is usually followed either by immense and immediate success, or by complete failure.

Lesh had made the attempt, and made it triumphantly. A Rosalind so fresh, so delightful, and far removed from the old stage traditions, had not appeared within the memory of the oldest playgoer.

She had taken her large and critical audience fairly by surprise. They had assembled for the purpose of seeing a *débutante*, and a finished actress, in all the fresh loveliness of her youth. Her great talent, accentuated by careful training and long study, had charmed and delighted them by her wonderful rendering of Shakespeare's sweet heroine.

The fashionable bijou theatre had echoed with thunders of applause when Lesh bowed her acknowledgments at the end of the play, while bouquets of fragrant hot-house flowers fell thick as hailstones around her.

Mr. Ashmead, almost off his head with delight, had given his pupil a fatherly kiss when she came off the stage, and congratulated her in the warmest terms upon the flattering reception she had gained.

"All the critics are here!" he said, excitedly. "There will be a long account of to-night's success in the papers to-morrow morning. They'll give a favourable account of your acting, every man jack of them! I can see it in their faces; and you'll be famous, my dear Miss Mowbray, before you hardly know where you are. The photographers will be after you like a swarm of bees when once your name becomes popular, and your face will soon be looking at us from every window."

"With some distinguished clergyman supporting me on one side, and a member of the Royal family on the other, I suppose!" she replied, with a smile. "Photographers do not show much regard for consistency in their mode of arranging their stock-in-trade. I shall not give them many sittings, however, for I do not think papa would like my photograph to become common property, and I am quite sure that I should not like it myself. Let us go home now and tell Mrs. Ashmead all about it; I know that she is longing to be made acquainted with the result of your pupil's first appearance."

But Lesh had said nothing to him respecting another triumph of the evening which for her alone had been full of sweetness far outweighing the pleasure she derived from the loud and continued plaudits of the large audience.

Sir Philip Margrave had been present from the time the curtain rose until it fell at the conclusion or the last scene.

His attention had been riveted upon her, and upon her alone, whenever she appeared upon the stage; and perceiving this, with all a woman's keenness, Lesh had exerted her inborn talent to the utmost limit, less in the endeavour to take the hearts of her audience generally by storm than in the effort to win the admiration and secure the love of the man who regarded her with ever-increasing wonder and interest as each succeeding scene served to develop some fresh phase, some new charm, in her sympathetic rendering of the character entrusted to her.

The most exquisite bouquet that fell to her share later on had come from Sir Philip Margrave's box. She had singled it out from among many others, and carried it away from the theatre with her. It was in her dressing-room now, carefully placed in a crystal vase filled with water, and its rich, heavy sweetness flooded the warm night air.

She did not know that he had come round to the stage-door in the hope of seeing her only a few minutes after the carriage containing Mrs. Ashmead, her maid, and herself had driven off in the direction of home.

The knowledge that she had thus missed him might have afforded her some disappointment. But then, was she not looking forward to a meet-

ing with him at Mrs. Seymour's on the morrow, when his congratulations—more valuable to her than anybody else would doubtless await her!

Leah felt restlessly happy as she stood before her glass in the dead of the starlit night, brushing her long hair, and softly humming some bars from an old song.

Life had suddenly opened out before her, teeming with fair dreams of wealth, fame, and happiness; of golden opportunities for doing good; while through them all, like a low, sweet refrain, ran dreamy, haunting thoughts of the love that would one day come to her in return for her own—the peerless love that would form the centre around which all other joys and interests should revolve, owning themselves to be but secondary things.

Thanks to her large salary she would be able from time to time to send money to her sorely embarrassed mother, to purchase some long-coveted surgical instruments for her father, and to raise presents upon the brood of younger brothers and sisters still remaining in the old home nest.

This reflection caused her heart to beat with fresh happiness, for the Vaughans were a very united family, and Leah knew well what an amount of interest and quiet, but deep satisfaction her success would afford to them all.

"Father and mother must come up to town to see me as Rosalind," she said to herself, with a little smile. "They are too good and too sensible to be ashamed of their actress daughter so long as she remains, like Caesar's wife, beyond suspicion! And perhaps some day they may even feel glad that she took to the boards. I shall be able to do so much more for them now, especially if my success really proves to be solid and lasting."

"And yet, if my profession should only enable me to do one thing, namely, to win Philip Margrave's love, to stamp my own image upon the heart in place of Margaret's, I think that I should for ever after feel grateful to it. Dear Philip, if only—but, there, I will not stand in front of the glass any longer," she continued, severely, "talking to myself and building castles, like the sentimental heroine of some rubbishy three-volume novel. I'll try to calm down a little, and go to bed, after the fashion of a reasonable mortal, or I shall not be in good order for my work to-morrow."

When she descended to the breakfast-room on the following morning Leah laughed merrily as she looked at the number of daily papers Mr. Ashmead had cut and arranged by the side of her plate, each paper being neatly turned down at a paragraph relating to the performance of the previous night.

"What a dear old goose he is!" she exclaimed, as she took up paper after paper and read with glowing eyes the differently worded accounts of her own triumph they contained.

Some were terse and critical, some discursive and full of unqualified praise, but all agreed in saying that an actress possessed of great artistic power, not to mention her personal qualifications, had appeared upon the stage, where she would doubtless occupy a high position.

When Leah had scanned the last paper, she laid it down with a little sigh of relief, and a pleasant feeling of security that had not been hers before.

She had looked forward to these public comments upon her acting with some dread, and now that the critics had stamped the hall-mark of their approval upon her success, it seemed to be a more definite and firmly established thing.

After rehearsal Leah paid a visit to Mrs. Seymour. That little lady had witnessed her young friend's *début*, and she overwhelmed her with congratulations which, if somewhat gushing, were still very real.

But as they chatted together, sitting side by side on a velvet lounge, Leah's eyes wandered almost unconsciously in the direction of the door.

Philip Margrave knew her usual hour for visiting Mrs. Seymour. Surely he would not fail to put in an appearance to-day, of all days, she told herself, as the fear of possible disap-

pointment began to overwhelm her. But Philip Margrave was too deeply interested in the young actress to neglect any opportunity of running himself in her society.

He entered Mrs. Seymour's drawing-room a little later on, and his pale, clear-cut face took a more animated expression as his glance rested upon Leah, whose small, graceful head, with its wealth of dark, loosely-coiled hair was bent over a tangled skein of crimson silk that she was charitably disentangling for Mrs. Seymour.

"I went behind the scenes last night when the performance was over," he said, in the quiet, well undulated tone habitual to him, after the ordinary greetings had taken place between them, "but to my regret I found the star had already vanished from sight, and the lesser luminaries not possessing any attraction for me, I soon took my departure."

"I think you are, one and all, doing your best to turn my head with flattery," Leah retorted with a smile that simply stoned for the reproachful words; "first the audience, then Mr. Ashmead, then the critics, then Mrs. Seymour, and lastly, you. I shall have to take common-sense for my balancing pole, or such a sudden influx of undeserved praise will make me giddy."

"It would be impossible to praise you too highly, Miss Mowbray," he replied, looking earnestly at her as he spoke. "What an exquisite treat you gave us all last night! Why, the discovery of a genius like yours is really the discovery of a new face, something to give jaded men and women an intellectual stimulus. The realistic plays of the day contain so little real literary merit—the praise connected with them being really due to the carpenter—that it is quite refreshing to fall back upon Shakespeare, by way of a change. I shall frequently figure among your audience."

"You will ruin yourself, though, if you always buy such expensive bouquets to throw on the stage!" said Leah, with a smile, tremulous from very happiness. "I have got last night's trophy at home now; it is much too lovely for me to leave it behind with the rest."

"How I envy those flowers!" replied Philip Margrave, earnestly; "and how can I thank you sufficiently for bestowing so much attention upon them?"

"They were the best," said Leah, with downcast eyes and a demure expression. "I only showed my worldly wisdom when I singled them out for special notice on that account."

"Then the giver had nothing at all to do with your choice!" he inquired, in an injured tone.

"He may have influenced it to some degree," she answered, with a sudden flush of colour to cheek and brow as she spoke; "but I have always been fond of flowers from a child."

"And you shall never be without them now," he replied, tenderly, with a little amusement at the innate truthfulness of her disposition. The young actress was beginning to exert a strong influence over him, and the old love gradually faded from his heart as the new one gained additional vitality. Leah's rare beauty charmed and fascinated him, while her powers of mind, her swift, changing, impulsive manner, and generally acknowledged talent aroused his admiration and respect. Even had Margaret been free and willing to become his wife, he would in all probability, have turned from her now to bestow all his attention upon Leah, who bewildered even while she attracted him.

And yet, although Philip Margrave's early love no longer occupied his thoughts, the desire to revenge upon her and her husband the pain and disappointment they had caused him in days gone by still existed. The injury had left no scar behind, but Philip's unforgiving spirit still urged him on to inflict some crushing blow in return for it. He kept himself well acquainted with Archie Lawrence's private affairs, and a scheme was even now taking shape in his brain that boded no good for the unsuspecting painter.

But when in Leah's presence no trace of the cloven foot was allowed to show itself. His attentions were marked, unmistakable, and Leah's hopes were rapidly nearing fulfilment, her lover had all but declared himself, when

something occurred to destroy the harmony previously existing in their lives and render them incapable of coming together in the usual manner.

CHAPTER V.

ARCHIE LAWRENCE was not permitted to travel so quickly along the high-road leading to fame and fortune as Leah herself. While the name of the successful young actress was on every lip, and her praises were being loudly chanted by all who were familiar with the stage, Lawrence continued to paint pictures and sell them at a price far below their real value.

Then a severe illness overtook him, and threw him far behind in his work. He recovered at length, thanks in a great measure to Margaret's careful nursing; but his little reserve fund had nearly melted away during this period of forced inactivity, and it took him some time to replace it.

Had Leah but known of the pecuniary embarrassments that so frequently overtook the Lawrences, she would instantly have placed her purse at their disposal.

But Archie Lawrence's sensitive pride would not allow him to seek assistance from any of his wife's relatives; and when Leah happened to be staying at Myrtle Cottage, the bright side of affairs alone was permitted to come under her notice.

But at length a promise of help, a little cheering notice and encouragement, fell to the share of the persevering young painter in a very unexpected manner.

It brought him no money at first, it is true; but it held out to him the hope of earning a great deal at no distant period, while it seemed to revive his flagging energies, and increase the keen longing for fame that had been his from the first.

A well-known R.A., the engravings of whose much-admired works are to be found in many English homes, happened to see one of Archie's pictures that was exposed for sale in the window of a shop in Wardour-street. It aroused his interest and admiration to such a degree that he took the trouble to obtain Archie's address from the dealer.

On the following day he went down to Richmond, introduced himself to the astonished and delighted painter, and courteously requested permission to view some of his other works, since the one he had already met with betokened the possession of no ordinary talent on the part of the artist.

With trembling hands Lawrence brought his neglected darlings forward from the various dusty holes and corners in which they had peacefully reposed, and placed them in a good light for his distinguished visitor's inspection.

The R.A. praised some of them, although he frowned at others; and, after listening attentively to the tale of frequent disappointment and systematic neglect that Archie unfolded to him, he promised to do all in his power to assist the young painter, and to bring his works into the notice they really merited.

He sent some artist friends on a visit to Lawrence's studio soon after this; they, in turn, introduced him to other brethren of the brush, and thus he gained a footing in the purely artistic circle which had so long refused to recognise or admit him as "one of us."

He was very much elated, poor fellow, by the pleasant, but moneyless, symptom of progress thus accorded to him.

Fortune would, as a matter of course, soon follow, he told himself hopefully, while fame itself, always dearer to the artist mind than fortune, would ere long, be his as well.

So, with little to cheer him in the present beyond blissful dreams of a golden future, Archie Lawrence set to work upon another picture intended for the Academy—a picture that would, doubtless, owing to his increased reputation, gain admission, and thus fare better than its luckless predecessors.

The encouragement he had gained had nerved him on to attempt yet greater things; and the

subject he selected as a fitting one on which to concentrate his now ripening powers in one mighty effort to achieve lasting fame called for nothing less than genius to do it ample justice.

He went to old Homer for inspiration, and the parting that takes place between Hector and Andromache on the walls of Troy, when the great, much-dreaded warrior becomes for a time the loving husband and father, was the particular episode chosen.

Margaret stood for the tearful, pleading Andromache, while her lovely boy smiled from the vast canvas as Hector's child.

Thus the two faces he loved best on earth regarded the painter day by day, as he worked steadily on, heedless of everything save the picture in course of completion, and upon which so many hopes depended.

He had selected that happy moment in the otherwise pathetic incident when Hector, to please his child—

"The glittering terrors from his brows unbound,
And plac'd the beaming helmet on the ground;
Then kiss'd the child, and lifting high in air,
Thus to the gods profess'd a father's prayer."

His work gained rapidly in power and beauty as he toiled at it from early morn till dusk, and his hopes grew yet higher as his beloved masterpiece neared completion.

Margaret, though, became seriously uneasy at her husband's thin, haggard appearance. The picture seemed to have taken possession of him; he had neither time nor attention to spare for anything beyond it.

Some weird old German myths, read long ago, recurred to her mind as Archie grew visibly gaunt and thin, while the cruel work that absorbed all his strength and energy, and prevented him from eating and sleeping as usual, became more grandly impressive than ever. His very life seemed to be bound up in it, and Margaret trembled lest a bitter disappointment should await him in the end. What effect such a disappointment would have upon his overstrained nature she hardly dared to imagine.

At length, greatly to her relief, the picture stood forth a finished work, and the uncertainty they were in respecting the verdict that the hanging committee would presently pass upon it formed the only rock ahead.

Meanwhile Archie became cheerful and sociable once more, willing to resume the habits of a civilized being, and his good little wife was careful to cast no cloud of doubt over his brief spell of sunshine.

A private view was granted to those artist friends of his who had kindly taken him by the hand.

They came, saw, and approved; the few gravely-spoken words of praise and commendation uttered by them being of more real value than all the gushing raptures and indiscriminate approval bestowed on the painter by ordinary acquaintances at such a time.

On the day after the private view Archie Lawrence received a note from the R.A. who had been the first to recognize his unusual talent, which ran as follows:—

"DEAR LAWRENCE,—

"Met a Sir Somebody—I forget his name—at the club last night, who happens to have heard a favourable account of your 'Hector and Andromache.' He is coming to see it, with some idea of ultimate purchase in his brain. Keep the price up, since I believe he can well afford to pay.

"Yours truly,
"R. M."

"What a good fellow he is," remarked the painter, gratefully, as he handed the tersely-written note to his wife; "always ready to do other people some valuable act of kindness. I strongly suspect the 'favourable account,' alluded to, came from his own lips. Well, if 'Sir Somebody' buys my picture we shall be set up with ready money for a long while to come, little woman, but when it is gone I shall feel almost as if I had sold part of myself. No picture

has ever been half so precious to me as the 'Hector.'"

Archie's little studio was put in perfect order by Margaret in honour of the expected visitor. She even went to the length of filling all the vases and jars it contained with flowers to give it a more pleasing aspect. Then she went back to the sitting-room and took up her work, unable altogether to control the excitement and now pleasant suspense that thrilled through her at the idea of a wealthy purchaser. For to practical Margaret fortune for herself and those she loved, meant so much more than fame.

A knock—a ring—and the servant, previously instructed, hurried to open the door. Then came the sound of a voice that seemed strangely familiar to Margaret as the visitor entered the studio, where Archie Lawrence was awaiting his arrival.

The painter was more surprised than pleased on finding himself face to face with Sir Philip Margrave. They had only met once before, when a collision between their respective boats had been so narrowly escaped upon the river. On that occasion, however, the painter had contracted a dislike for his wife's old lover that he found very difficult to shake off.

"I think you have received a note, Mr.—er Lawrence, informing you of my intention respecting your lately finished work," said the Baronet, with a cool and perfectly unembarrassed air. "Should it, upon inspection, suit my taste, I shall in all probability become a purchaser."

"The note you allude to has reached me," replied Archie Lawrence, "but owing to a lapse of memory on the part of the writer, the name of the intended purchaser has not transpired."

"Then pray allow me to introduce myself," said Sir Philip Margrave, handing his card to the painter as he spoke. "I was well known to Mrs. Lawrence previous to her marriage, although the pleasure of making her husband's acquaintance has been reserved for the present moment."

The tone in which he uttered these words was perfectly courteous and conventional, and yet there was a strain of suppressed irony running through it that annoyed the painter sorely. Why had this man, of all others, come forward as a purchaser when the work of a successful rival was in question? Was it to prove that he had forgiven Lawrence for having won Margaret away from him in the days gone by? The painter's simple, honest nature, willing to put the best construction on the actions of others, induced him to accept this self-prompted explanation, although a strange feeling of reluctance to allow his cherished masterpiece to become Philip Margrave's property still possessed him. It was like handing a favourite child over to the tender mercies of a man whom he secretly distrusted.

"So this is the picture," the Baronet remarked, with a peculiar smile, as he took up his position in front of the easel. "A valuable work of art beyond a doubt. Some of those fellows spoke of it last night as being the best that you have ever produced. Is that correct?"

"Yes," replied Archie, frankly; "I have put the best work that I am capable of into it, and my hopes of fame rest chiefly upon this, my latest and most successful effort. Sold or unsold, I intend it to go to the Academy."

"Oh, by all means," said Philip Margrave, that peculiar smile resting again upon his face as he spoke. "It shall go to the Academy after to-day if you still wish to exhibit it. And now for business. I am willing to purchase the picture; you have only to name your price."

Somewhat reluctantly, considering what a poor man he was, the painter did name it. Without making any demur Philip Margrave wrote a cheque for the amount and handed it to him.

"You will give me a receipt please," he said, carelessly; "just as a matter of form."

Archie Lawrence gave the required receipt, and then the two men stood side by side, silently regarding the picture that had just changed hands.

"The face of Andromache seems very familiar to me," Philip Margrave remarked, presently. "I could swear that I have frequently seen it before."

"My wife consented to act as my model,"

replied the painter, sorry to think he had placed Margaret's face upon the canvas, since Philip Margrave had purchased it. "Doubtless, since you have met her at different times in the years gone by, you recognise the likeness!"

"I do recognise the likeness!" said Philip Margrave, with a sudden flash of hatred shining from out of his light grey eyes. "Could I fail to remember the face of the woman who did her best to blight my life not so long ago, by turning a deaf ear to my entreaties, and spurning the gift of title and fortune I laid at her feet, because a beggarly painter had won her love during my brief absence from home? I told her on the eve of her marriage-day that I would make you both suffer double for the pain you have caused me! The time has come for me to fulfil my promise or threat, whichever you like to call it. So much for your masterpiece, on which all your hopes of fame depend. See, like a savage critic, I am about to cut it up for you."

And before Archie Lawrence could prevent him, he had produced a sharp, thin knife, of foreign manufacture, and gashed the triumph of art before him from top to bottom in half-a-dozen places, till the canvas hung in long strips from the frame.

"Madman! fiend! what have you done!" cried the unhappy artist, as he gazed wildly upon the scene of his cherished work.

"This is my Roland for your Oliver!" replied Philip Margrave, with a cynical shrug. "And, after all, I have only done what I please with my own. Shall we send it to the Academy now, Lawrence? It would create a perfect furor."

But Archie Lawrence made no reply. One bitter despairing moan alone broke from his dry lips, as he fell senseless at the foot of the murdered creation.

That moan brought Margaret to the studio terrified and breathless. One glance at its occupants and the contents of the great easel sufficed to acquaint her with all that had occurred.

Gently she raised her husband's heavy head upon her breast, then with an expression of horror and reproach upon her face, that haunted him for many a long day after, she looked at Philip Margrave, and without a word held out her hand in the direction of the door.

CHAPTER VI.

ON leaving Richmond soon after the little episode already decribed had taken place, Philip Margrave felt by no means inclined to go straight back to town.

The story of his doings at Myrtle Cottage, his purchase of the artist's lately-finished and much-admired work, and its subsequent fate might get wind, especially now that some well-known R.A.'s had taken Lawrence by the hand, and were doing their best to bring him on, thanks to the undeniable talent he possessed.

Popular feeling might in that case wax warm against him for a while, and Clubland itself grow too hot to hold him.

The motive which had prompted him in his revengeful act might not leak out however; Lawrence and his wife would, in all probability, strive to keep it secret; and some other interesting topic would soon succeed in driving the memory of his own unprecedented conduct from the popular mind.

He would go away for a week or two until the whole affair had blown over and become a thing of the past. Even supposing it to have been public property—which was still a matter of doubt—society is not slow to forgive a male offender when he happens to be rich and a bachelor; and Philip felt certain that on his return to town a cordial greeting would await him, while people would be charitably blind to his doings in the past.

He had contrived to wreck his long-cherished revenge upon the man who had once injured him—according to his own version of the matter—by wooing and wedding the girl upon whom his own heart had been set.

Most men would have forgiven and forgotten such an injury long ago; for Archie Lawrence

had been guilty of no mean or dishonourable tactics in winning his bride; his courtship all through had been perfectly fair and above board.

But Philip Margrave's cold, hard, self-centred nature cherished hatred far more easily than love; and since the painter had ventured to cross his path and carry off the prize he had singled out for himself, Philip determined to punish him for such unpardonable audacity sooner or later.

He had done so, and certain twinges of conscience were boldly attacking him in return, as the express carried him swiftly away from the scene of his vindictive act.

Hitherto his ideas as to the justice and propriety of revenge had been confined to theory. Now that he had put them into practice they made him feel very uneasy.

When merely under contemplation an action presents such a different appearance to that which it assumes when once it has taken place and become a fixed, unalterable fact, to be answered for in this world or the next.

Philip Margrave almost wished his day's work undone as he unwillingly recalled to mind Margaret's look of horrified reproach, and her husband's despairing cry, uttered as he fell senseless at the foot of his mutilated picture.

He had gone a little too far, he acknowledged gloomily to himself; but surely the fellow would recover and go on with his work as usual!

He had no desire to wear the mark of Cain upon his brow. A picture more or less in his studio ought not to affect Lawrence so deeply; and had he, Philip, not purchased the picture in question before bringing his knife to bear upon it?

He had sought to punish the painter through his ambition, and he had well-nigh succeeded in depriving him of his life into the bargain.

Philip Margrave resolved to send his valet to Richmond with strict orders to keep himself well posted up in the events that transpired at Myrtle Cottage—said events to be wired to his master as they occurred without delay.

Not until he heard that Lawrence was likely to recover could he realise the extent of the sickening dread he had experienced lest the painter's untimely death should be laid at his door by the stern Nemesis of inward conviction and popular opinion.

His present destination was a village near Shrewsbury, where a bachelor friend, who had given him an open invitation to come when he liked, owned a small estate. Much to his annoyance, however, on arriving there, Philip Margrave was informed that Squire Bawson had been called away from home unexpectedly on the previous day, owing to the illness of a relation.

There was nothing for him to do under the circumstances save to seek quarters at the village inn—called by courtesy an hotel—the landlord of which received his unexpected guest with great satisfaction, and a vast amount of fussy attention into the bargain.

"I think you will find everything very comfortable and quite to your mind here, sir," he remarked blandly, washing his hands with invisible soap and imperceptible water after the fashion of landlords and waiters in general, as he spoke.

"We always do our best to please and satisfy our visitors, and my good lady cooks herself."

"Indeed, that must be rather a painful operation, I should imagine," said Philip, drily, as he took possession of his rooms in anything but a pleased and satisfied frame of mind.

In the next few days he amused himself by taking long walks about the neighbourhood when it was fine, and writing an article intended for a scientific journal, to which he was an occasional contributor, when it rained, as it frequently did for hours together.

Before leaving this quiet spot, Philip Margrave wished to arrive at a satisfactory answer to a very important question, one that was likely to affect his happiness in a vital manner.

Should he, or should he not on his return to town, ask Pauline Mowbray, the celebrated young actress, to become Lady Margrave?

Rich and well-born himself, he did not feel very anxious to meet with either of these qualities in a prospective wife.

He could afford to pick and choose—a luxury

not enjoyed by the majority of men when matrimony is in question.

A clever, beautiful woman without either rank or fortune would be infinitely more to his taste than a plain heiress, or a fair patrician of only average intellectual merits.

The idea of marrying Pauline Mowbray and robbing the public of a recently-gained and much-prized acquisition, a new dramatic star, by so doing, had a peculiar zest for Philip Margrave.

Then he was deeply in love with her, and this love formed yet another reason why he should endeavour to secure her before a whole host of rivals entered the field against him.

Other men of good position had married actresses, and their wives had been well received. Pauline's graceful, tall and unconscious dignity, aided by her husband's influence, would quickly secure for her a favourable reception from society in her new character.

How queenly she would look seated at the head of his table, Philip reflected, with the family diamonds gleaming in her soft, dark hair, and sparkling amidst the lace that rose and fell on her white bosom!

Yes, he would snap his fingers at Mrs. Grundy, and marry Pauline, in spite of that dear old lady's horrified remonstrances!

He did not even anticipate a refusal or a disappointment of any kind in connection with the offer he had decided to make. Pauline's bearing towards him had served to encourage rather than to damp his hopes of winning her; when once he should have screwed himself up to the proposing point.

The story of his recent doings at Richmond, if actively circulated, might reach her ears. But in that case he would soon be at hand to give her his own revised version of it, and she would not be likely to take much interest in the Lawrences or their affairs, since, according to his own idea, they were perfect strangers to her.

Philip Margrave remained at the inn till his friend came home again. Then he spent a week or two with him; after which period of dullness and seclusion the town-loving Baronet was quite ready to return to London, and face any unpleasantness that might be in store for him there.

He called at the Ashmeads house the day after his return, for he was anxious to get the important interview with Pauline over without delay.

She was alone when the servant ushered him into the drawing-room, and as he advanced to greet her with outstretched hand he became aware of a marked coldness—a studied reserve in her manner which had never been there before.

"They've been telling her some confounded nonsense about the Richmond affair," he thought, angrily, "and she is inclined to view me in the light of a second Mephistopheles! However, it will not take me long to set matters right again when once the ice has been broken between us."

"I have been away for nearly three weeks," he remarked, plaintively, as he seated himself beside her, "and yet you have not even said that you are glad to see me again, Miss Mowbray. I have been counting the hours till now in my desire to enjoy the pleasure of your society once more. You might, in return, have given me a warmer welcome."

As he uttered these words Leah's dark eyes regarded him steadily, while an expression of mingled sorrow and reproach shone in their clear depths.

"You had no right to expect a warm welcome from me of all people, Sir Philip," she replied, coldly. "The slight acquaintance existing between us would hardly justify anything of the kind!"

"Slight acquaintance!" he repeated, with genuine astonishment. "Why, we have been meeting each other nearly every day for months past, and I have never attempted to conceal the nature of the feelings I entertain towards you. Pauline, speak plainly to me, and say what has served to prejudice you against me during my short absence? When I tell you that I am here for the purpose of asking you to become my

darling wife, you will understand better how your changed manner grieves and perplexes me!"

But she only turned away from him to bury her face in the velvet sofa cushions and burst into a flood of tears.

"Pauline, what is the meaning of this!" he inquired, earnestly. "Have you no love to give me in return for that which I offer you?"

"Yes, I do love you!" she sobbed, in all the generous abandon of a grand nature; "and I have looked forward to the time when you would seek to win my love, and place your own at my disposal. But now everything is changed. Although I love you I cannot—I dare not—become your wife; and your own act has forced me to arrive at this conclusion."

"At least you will consent to explain the meaning of such enigmatical words!" said Philip Margrave, angrily.

"Is it necessary for me to do so?" she inquired, sadly; "or have you already forgotten the occurrence at Richmond in which you figured so prominently?"

"I fell out with an artist there a few weeks ago," he replied, undauntedly, "and the ruin of a picture, for which I had previously paid, was the result. Some garbled version of the matter has, I presume, reached your ears; but I cannot tell why it should influence your decision with regard to your becoming my wife, or in any way affect our mutual happiness!"

"Not when Margaret Lawrence, for whose loss you revenged yourself by destroying her husband's cherished work, and bringing him, to the verge of the grave, is my beloved sister!" continued Leah, rising as she spoke, and boldly confronting her astonished wooer. "When we two met, shortly before my first appearance upon the stage, you failed to recognise me under my changed appearance and my assumed name, and, for reasons best known to myself, I did not then undeceive you. I am Leah Vaughan, and now you know why, after what has happened, I can never become your wife."

Leah Vaughan! Was it possible that a thin, gawky school-girl had really possessed the power of changing into such a magnificent woman!

The question passed through Philip Margrave's mind almost mechanically, as he regarded her with a sensation of mingled astonishment, vain regret, and passionate admiration.

"Leah, why should one wrong, mistaken deed serve to keep us asunder, my darling?" he cried, wildly. "You will forgive me the pain that I have all unintentionally caused you. Had I known they were related to you I would have pardoned them and allowed them to go free for your sake."

"You can bring forward no excuse for the cruel, revengeful deed of which you have been guilty," Leah continued, with forced calmness, "and therefore we must part. Why, the very fact of your seeking to injure poor Archie Lawrence because Margaret chored him for her husband instead of yourself, goes to prove that she still holds the first place in your heart."

"She does nothing of the kind," he replied, fervently. "Leah, I swear to you that from the time of my first meeting with you here in London, after you had undergone such a wonderful transformation from the Leah of other days, I ceased to care for your sister, and my love became yours alone."

"If what you tell me is really true," said Leah, "your pitiless deed only assumes a yet more unpardonable aspect. You frankly confess that you cherished revenge in your heart when the cause that had first given rise to it no longer existed. You punished poor Margaret's husband for his audacity in gaining her affection, even when you had ceased to care for her yourself. Your attempt at self-exoneration only serves to add to your guilt in my sight, and to reveal the utter want of forgiveness and generosity that characterises all your actions. After what has occurred I cannot consent to link my life with yours. We must part, and for the future our intercourse, when we happen to meet in society, will be of the slightest."

And Philip Margrave, too proud to plead when pleading was of no avail, went out from her

presence with a strange, dreary sense of misery and utter blankness resting upon him. His revenge, once sweet to the taste, had now become exceedingly bitter.

(Continued on page 280.)

MISS GILMOUR'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER XXII.

RUTH'S MISSION.

THAT night had been Minna's worst, and seemed to mark a crisis in her illness, after which she gradually began to mend. Not so quickly, however, as the doctor expected, and he confessed himself puzzled, just as he had been in the first stages of her attack.

The delirium vanished, and was succeeded by a kind of lethargy that precluded all interest in outward things.

For hours Minna would lie motionless, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her face as devoid of expression as a wax doll's; and when either of her sisters approached with jelly or beef-tea, she obeyed their wishes and swallowed the food without appearing to be aware of what she was doing.

She never spoke unless to answer a question, and then as briefly as possible; and this was a doubly strange development for lively Minna, whose tongue used to run on so rapidly and inconsequently—at the rate of twenty to the dozen, as Clem had often told her.

As a nurse Clem proved herself admirable; she was never tired, she never forgot anything; she was invariably cheerful, and even gentle; but, in spite of this, it became clear that Minna was more restless in her presence than in Ruth's; in effect, the younger sister's ministrations did the patient more good. Clem recognised this with a pang, and indeed it seemed a little hard, for upon her had fallen all the hard work of nursing, the sitting up at night, the whole burden of anxiety in fact.

One afternoon, when she had somewhat reluctantly consented to go out for a walk, Ruth took her place at the bedside, sitting with calmly folded hands—for Ruth never demeaned herself by knitting or needlework—and dreaming eyes fixed on the window. Ruth was working out some mental problem, from which she was aroused by Minna's voice.

"Do you want anything, dear?" the ex-Nunham girl asked, putting out her hand to reach the beef-tea.

"Nothing of that kind; I am always eating or drinking," the patient answered, fretfully. "Clem worries me dreadfully."

"It is for your good, Minna."

"That doesn't make it any better." Minna looked round the room. "Where is she now?"

"Gone into the Park."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure of what, dear?" Ruth queried, in surprise.

"That she is really gone. She may be about the passages, listening or watching."

"That is quite out of the question. I saw her go along the avenue myself not ten minutes ago."

"Run to the window and see if she is coming back."

Ruth obeyed, treating the request as one of the fancies of a capricious invalid. In the distance she caught sight of Clem's tall, angular figure striding along towards the woods. Minna seemed more satisfied when she heard this, but remained silent for a little while, as if endeavouring to collect her thoughts.

She put her hand—it was very thin and white—to her brow with a little gesture of weariness.

"My head aches so when I try to think," she said, with a half-peevish, half-pathetic tone in her voice.

"Then don't try."

"But I must. My brain seems all in a muddle still, I want to get it clear. How long have I been ill, Ruth?"

Ruth counted back, using her fingers for the purpose, just as any less gifted person, who had never heard of Nunham, might have done.

"It is just a fortnight since you took to your bed—a fortnight to-day."

Minna reflected for a little while—anxiously, if the pucker of her white forehead were an index of her thoughts, then she said,—

"Tell me all that has happened since then—all Ruth, do you understand?"

"Well, there was a fuss over Miss Gilmour, who went away in rather a mysterious fashion. I was sorry for it," Ruth added, regretfully, "she was clever, and she was kind. She often helped me with my articles."

"Won't she come back again?"

"No! she and Aunt Sue seemed to have parted company for good and all. Then Aunt Sue left, and Rafe went up to London, and the police came to search the house."

"I know all that," Minna explained impatiently. "I want to hear what has happened since."

"Nothing," responded Ruth—for it had been decided to keep silence concerning the death of Denis until she was quite convalescent. "We have all been anxious about you, but beyond that things have gone on as usual."

"The police have not been again?"

"No."

Minna raised herself on her pillows, looking more eager and animated than she had done since her illness—more like her old pretty self.

"Will you do something for me Ruth—something that you must not mention to Clem or Rafe, or anybody?"

"What is it?" cautiously asked Ruth.

"I can't tell you till you have promised. It is nothing dishonourable, but it is of very great importance to me. Oh, Ruth dear, I haven't asked you many favours in my life—you might grant me this one!"

"Very well, I promise."

Minna, whose demeanour had threatened to become feverishly excited, grew more calm. She drew a deep breath, then, lowering her voice, she said,—

"I want you to go over to Sister Monica's cottage—you know where it is—and say to her 'Is all well?'—and bring me back her answer."

"Dear me!" said Ruth, almost with an accent of disappointment. "Is that all?"

"That's all, only you must keep your visit a secret, and contrive to go into the cottage when no one is about. Do you think you can manage it this evening?"

"I'm afraid not—unless Clem comes back very soon, which I hardly expect. You see it is some distance to Sister Monica's cottage."

"Yes, but you are a good walker, and don't mind distance. However, you must go when you can, and be sure to give me her return message when we are alone."

Ruth had no opportunity for obeying her sister's behest that evening. The next morning, however, she set out soon after breakfast for the cottage on the edge of the moor.

She had passed it often enough on her constitutional, but up to the present had never crossed its threshold.

With her near-sighted eyes she peered about to find bell or knocker, and not discovering either, put on her eyeglasses, which were tucked inside her dress.

In the interval she heard the sound of voices from within—one of them evidently that of a man.

Her summons was not answered immediately, and she noticed that the voices at once ceased. When Sister Monica finally appeared at the door, the room into which she invited her visitor was empty, neither did it bear any signs of having had another inmate.

Ruth gave her message; the Sister was silent for a few minutes after hearing it, then she went outside, and returned with a feather which she had apparently picked up off the ground, and which she cut in half.

"Tell Miss Ferrers—yes, all is well, and give her this."

Ruth took it wonderingly, but without comment and put it in her pocket. She did not feel at

ease, and to cover her embarrassment, made some remark concerning the weather.

"Yes, the rains were getting serious," the Sister answered, in her low, well-modulated voice, "several of the houses in the lower part of the village were flooded and there was a good deal of illness about in consequence."

"I expect you have had some patients here," observed Ruth, who knew the cottage was often used as an infirmary, and who fancied the voice she had heard might belong to one of the sick villagers. To her surprise, the Sister answered in the negative.

"I have not had a patient from the village for several months now," she added.

Ruth did not go straight home. She had run out of manuscript paper, and thinking she might possibly get some in the village went there to try—unsuccessfully as it proved. This took her a good deal out of her way, and being near the Vicarage, she called in, and was persuaded to stay to luncheon. When she set out for home, it was nearly four o'clock and growing dusk.

Ruth cut off part of the distance by going through the woods; but before she was half-way home she almost regretted her choice, for she remembered Rafe had warned her against these special covert spots on account of the many traps set by the keepers for the benefit of the vermin which abounded. After the recollection, she proceeded more cautiously; presently the path dipped into a hollow, at the bottom of which was rather a large pool, known by the name of "Dead Woman." There was a story that many years ago, it had been the scene of a suicide, and people rather avoided it in consequence. Midway down, Ruth paused for a moment to look at it and to think in her matter-of-fact way, that if one wanted to get rid of one's life, one could hardly choose a more suitable spot for the operation. She put up her glasses in order to view it better; and, indeed, the place wore a specially weird and uncanny look in the fading light of the December evening. Just here, the trees were planted more sparsely, and their naked boughs stood out in dark relief against a pale sky, while below, the still black waters of the pool shone with an inky kind of lustre, and suggested in some vague way, unknown horrors lurking beneath the surface.

As Ruth looked, she became aware of a woman's figure, wearing black drapery over the head and face, some little distance in front. It was Sister Monica, who walked with swift and noiseless footsteps down to the pool, and who, after one quick glance round, which passed over Ruth without distinguishing her from the shadows in which she stood—took from under her arm a basket, and stowed its contents beneath a rock quite close to the water's margin. Having done this, she blew a small whistle, took up her basket again, and began to retrace her footsteps.

Some instinct told Ruth that the Sister would be displeased if she knew this action of hers had been witnessed, and—solely from motives of delicacy—she drew back behind the trunk of a tree, and waited until she had passed by. When her dark-robed figure was quite out of sight, the young girl came out of her concealment just in time to see a man gathering up the various packages left under the rock and stowing them away in his pocket. From this distance, she could see very little of his downy features, but she was amazed at the suddenness with which he disappeared. All in a moment his figure vanished, and—if it had not been so absurd—Ruth would have declared he stepped into the pool itself.

She pursued her way rather less comfortably. Ruth did not like mysteries, in fact, she would not admit their existence, but her logic did not help to explain them away.

Minna was awaiting her in eager anxiety. Luckily Clem chanced to be out of the sick room when Ruth arrived, so she was able to deliver the cut feather, and the enigmatic sentence that accompanied it without delay.

At first Minna looked at the feather with puzzled eyes. A minute later, her face cleared.

"Ah, I understand!" she murmured; but she did not explain what it was she understood.

When Ruth went down, it was with the full intention of telling Rafe her adventure, but in the hall she found a bundle of proofs which had come for her by the afternoon post, and which thereupon engrossed her attention to the exclusion of everything else.

In the delight of seeing her thoughts in print, and correcting errors, she forgot all about the strange man in the wood, and thus it happened that some days elapsed before she mentioned the event to Rafe.

His interest was immediately aroused—and in these days this was something unusual, for Rafe had become very listless and inert, and people were saying his half-brother's death had affected him much more than they would have expected.

"You say that after taking the food, the man disappeared in the pool?" he asked, when Ruth had finished her history.

"Well, it is impossible he could have disappeared in the pool, but he gave me that impression," she amended. "There is an old tree stump, with a lot of brambles round it, just on the edge of the water, and these hid him from view all in a moment."

He nodded intelligently.

"Shall I tell you what those brambles conceal, Ruth? Nothing more nor less than a cave hollowed out of the rock on which the brambles grow. It is a couple of feet below the level of the earth, and the hanging boughs hide its entrance. But who the man can be I cannot imagine. I fancied the secret of it was known only to myself and one other person. I must go and investigate the matter."

It happened that Rafe was not able to go down to "Dead Woman" for the next few days. He was busy with new cottages he was putting up on the estate, and also with drainage schemes by which he hoped to improve the land. His wound was quite well by this time, and he was able to go about as usual. As a matter of fact he was very rarely in the house, and when he was, he made a point of filling up every moment of spare time either in elaborating plans or in writing business letters. There was something absolutely feverish in his anxiety to leave himself no time for dwelling on the past.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CLEM'S VICTORY.

CONSIDERABLY more than a week had passed by before Rafe went down to the pool and investigated the cavern. It was empty, nevertheless, from various indications—such as the remains of food, a morsel of tobacco, and the broken stem of a pipe, he came to the conclusion that it had recently had a tenant.

Who it was he had no means of discovering, though it seemed pretty clear that Sister Monica could have assisted him to find out if he had applied to her; but this he shrank from doing, and though he was annoyed at the idea of a stranger sharing a secret which he had fancied belonged solely to himself and his brother Denis, he, after a while, dismissed the subject from his mind.

Christmas came and went, by no means a typical Christmas, for there was neither frost nor snow, and the schoolboys complained bitterly of the lack of skating. Still the unusual mildness of the weather had its compensations; fox-hunting went on merrily, and three or four times a week Rafe would go out early in the morning and not return until the evening shadows had spread their veil over the landscape. Physical weariness was the best anodyne for heartache, he found.

Meanwhile Minna, whose recovery had been very slow, gradually progressed towards convalescence, and was once more up and about.

Her first visit had been to Sister Monica's cottage, whither Ruth had driven her over in the pony-carriage, waiting outside while she and the Sister carried on a *à la tête* within.

This visit was often repeated; strange to say Minna seemed to have become very devoted to the lonely woman, and though Clem disapproved of the frequency of the visits, she had no power to prevent them.

Her efforts were now concentrated on the endeavour to throw Rafe and Minna together as much as possible.

If they would only marry each other, then her anxieties would be at an end! But at present, this consummation looked a little hazy.

Rafe was exceedingly kind to his cousin, brought her flowers, books, choice fruit, and seemed to take a pleasure in petting her.

But there was nothing lover-like in his demeanour. As to Minna, she accepted his attentions passively, perhaps gratefully, certainly not with effusion, and at last Clem decided to bring matters to a crisis.

It was one afternoon late in January. Outside a low grey sky hung over the leafless trees, and the uplands lost themselves in mist.

Inside, the firelight sparkled bright on the gold frames of the pictures, the brass and polished steel of the fireirons, and brought out rich depths of colour in the crimson carpet and curtains.

Minna was lying listlessly back against the cushions of a low arm-chair, her thin white fingers playing idly with a Japanese screen. Clem sat opposite, bolt upright, and knitting for dear life.

"Why didn't you play chess with Rafe last night when he challenged you to a game?" she demanded, abruptly, and Minna looked up with a start, she had been lost in her own reflections.

"I felt rather tired, and disinclined for a game."

"You should have made an effort. Rafe was trying to please you, and the least you could do was to respond. You remember our conversation in your bedroom on the night of the dinner-party?"

Minna nodded, without meeting her sister's eyes.

"Well, the situation is in no wise altered. It is just as important that you should marry Rafe now as it was then."

"Hardly," the younger girl returned, with a faint flavour of satire in her voice. "At that time you were afraid of Miss Gilmour's influence, but that is a thing of the past. Poor Miss Gilmour!" she added regretfully, for in her way she had been very fond of the beautiful companion.

"Designing Minn!" interjected Clem, spitefully, and she stuck her knitting-needle into the sock with a vicious stab, curiously illustrative of her frame of mind. "Yes, it's true she's gone, but Rafe was very much in love with her, and he's just in that state when if another attractive woman came in his way he would marry her for the sake of getting Ursula Gilmour out of his mind. I tell you, Minna, now is your best chance, and you are a fool if you don't make use of it. You are quite old enough to marry, in less than two months you will be twenty-one."

"When you and Ruth were twenty-one, did not Rafe make you a present of a thousand pounds?" Minna asked, with more vivacity than she had as yet displayed.

"Yes, and he will do the same for you."

"How do you know?"

"Because he said he should, and Rafe's word is as good as his bond. Now, Minna, be sensible, and respond to his advances more warmly. Your way is clear, and now that poor Denis is dead you can surely have no more scruples."

At the mention of her dead lover's name the poor child burst into tears, and at that precise moment Rafe came in, still in his pink coat.

He stood on the threshold hesitating, when he saw Minna's condition; she, however, cut the gordian knot of his difficulty by rushing from the room through a second door, Clem still keeping her seat, and going on steadily with her knitting.

"You are earlier than usual," she observed, as he flung himself into the seat just vacated by Minna, and pushed his hair rather wearily back from his brow.

"Yes. By-the-way, what's up with Minna?"

Clem did not reply at once. A dozen ideas were whirling through her brain, the foremost one being that if she grasped the situation with a strong hand, she might yet be able to save it.

Minna was weak, Rafe was strong; but out of the weakness of the one, and the strength of the other, she fancied she might mould her purpose.

Her cheeks grew flushed, she put down her knitting.

"Since you have asked me I will answer, candidly. She is in love."

"Minna in love! With whom?"

"Can't you guess, Rafe?"

Rafe was by no means a conceited man; but it was hardly possible to ignore the meaning conveyed by Clem's look and manner. He started slightly, and coloured.

"Nonsense, Clem! It surely isn't that!"

"It is that," she rejoined, steadily, "and that is the reason her illness presented such unusual difficulties. She fancied her affection hopeless, and she did not want to get well. Haven't you noticed how miserable and depressed she has become, how thin and pale, and unlike her former self?"

He had noticed it; but, to his shame, he confessed, he had been so wrapped up in his own troubles as to be able to spare little thought for those of other people.

Now the remembrance of the young girl's altered looks and manner struck him with a sudden remorse. He recalled how bright and piquant she used to be, her ready smile, her playful wit, her saucy little speeches, all of which had pleased and amused him in the old days before Ursula's advent. She had certainly altered very much of late—indeed, she was quite another creature.

He rose and began to pace the room evidently much perturbed. This disclosure upset him greatly, he could not dismiss it from his mind. At last he came to a pause by Clem's side.

"Are you sure of this, or is it only conjecture?" he asked with a certain sternness.

"I am sure of it," she answered, unfalteringly, and Rafe did not press her farther—indeed, it would have seemed to him indelicate to do so, for he made no doubt that she was in Minna's confidence—more, that Minna had in so many words confessed her secret.

Clem watched him apprehensively as he resumed his measured tramp up and down the room. Her heart was beating so fast that she had to press her two hands against it; knitting was out of the question.

She had staked everything on this one throw, and his next words would decide whether she had lost or won. But the next words were slow in coming—so slow, that unable to bear the suspense any longer, she spoke first.

"You will keep what I have said to you secret, Rafe? Minna would never forgive me if she thought I had betrayed her."

He stopped and stood opposite her on the hearthrug. The firelight shone on his bronzed face—grown worn and haggard, and aged in these last months, and in the depths of his kind, sad eyes.

He was thinking of the passion of sobriety in which Minna had quitted the room, and the idea that he was the cause of them touched him keenly. Poor little Minna! He knew the pain of a hopeless love; but it seemed hard that the knowledge should blight her young life as well.

In the first flush of generous pity it appeared to him there was only one way out of the difficulty. He must marry Minna after all, she would not be an unsuitable match for him. She was young, pretty, amiable, and some of his own blood ran in her veins.

She would make a fairly good mistress of Westwood. Yes, and perhaps she would help him to still the heartache that that other woman had left behind her.

"I shall respect your confidence, Clementine," he said, gravely, "and I shall make you my ambassador to Minna. You are aware that I cannot offer a passionate love; but, on the other hand, if she will marry me I will do my best to make her a good husband. It would not be fair to marry her without letting her know my former feelings towards Miss Gilmour, and it is for this reason that I think it better you should approach her first on my behalf. Will you undertake the mission and give me her answer in the morning?"

Would she not? Clem felt like going down on her knees and thanking Heaven for this answer to her prayers. It was just as much as she could do to fold her knitting up with trembling hands,

and answer "Yes," to his demand. She was glad when he went hastily from the room, for now she could let the triumph that she had found it so hard to hide, have full play in her face. At last her dream was about to be fulfilled—at last, at last!

She laid her hand thin against her heart once more, but this time it beat with a glad sense of victory instead of with fear. Now all that remained was to see Minna, and make her aware of her good fortune.

The sisters had a long interview that night. What passed at it no one save the two principally concerned, ever knew. Clem's task was a hard one, but then, she was a hard task-master, and Minna's will was weakened both by anxiety and physical depression. In the end she yielded, and the next morning Clem took her answer to Rafe.

Before the day was out the whole household knew they were engaged, and that same week the betrothal was announced in the county paper. Clem was answerable for both these facts; there should be no drawing back, she had decided, and the best way to prevent all chance of it, was to give publicity to the engagement. The wedding was to take place very soon and very quietly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MISSING BRIDE.

MINNA'S twenty-first birthday fell on the fifteenth of March, and on the sixteenth she was to be married. Rafe had proved exceedingly generous in the matter of settlements, and as she heard the terms Clem congratulated herself more than ever on her success in bringing the marriage about. Minna showed little interest in them, but once when her elder sister was expatiating on their munificence, she suddenly said,—

"Do you think they will make any difference to the thousand pounds that Rafe promised to give me for a birthday present?"

"All the difference in the world I should imagine. What is a thousand pounds compared with the sum he is settling on you?"

"Oh, I hope he will give it me—I do hope he will!" exclaimed Minna, clasping her hands with inexplicable fervour. "All the rest is settled on his wife, but that thousand pounds I shall look upon as my own, my very own to do exactly what I like with."

"Then you should mention the matter to him. I daresay he would fall in with your wishes. So far he has denied you nothing you asked."

This was true. There were no excessive demonstrations of affection between the engaged pair, but it seemed as if Rafe tried to atone for his scanty love-making by showering presents on his fiancée, and when she—very timidly and shame-facely—spoke about her birthday gift, he at once declared that it had been his intention to give her a cheque for a thousand pounds as he had given one to each of her sisters when they attained their majority.

"And you won't mind on what or on whom I spend it?" she asked, anxiously.

He smiled.

"Certainly not. It is yours absolutely, and I shall never ask you what use you make of it."

"You are very kind to me," she murmured, "a great deal kinder than I deserve."

"That is a matter of opinion. I want to make you happy, and if I succeed that will be reward enough."

She looked at him wistfully, took a step towards him and seized his hand—hesitated, and finally ran from the room to hide the tears that had gathered in her eyes.

Her demure often puzzled Rafe, and he wondered over it. If he had really loved her, it would have puzzled him still more.

Time went on bringing the wedding-day nearer. Meanwhile nothing had been heard of poor Denis Marchant's murderer, and people were beginning to forget the tragedy, which, owing to its having taken place abroad, and the fact of other and more exciting events happening at the same time, had never made a very great stir. Over

in Vienna, a cross had been raised above the place where his remains rested, and a brief memorial was graven on the family vaults in Westwood Church, where his mother lay buried. For the rest his name was rarely mentioned in Westwood, and Clem began to hope that Minna had forgotten him. She did not credit the younger girl with much feeling, or much will, but in this estimate of her character she had afterwards to confess herself mistaken.

Contrary to her usual custom, Clem professed to take a great interest in the details of the trousseau, which, however, was neither very extensive nor costly. This was due to Minna's own wishes, and it was all the stranger inasmuch as Minna used to be excessively fond of dress, and had often been rated soundly by her elder sister for her extravagance. Now, it was Clem who wanted to be extravagant, and Minna who held her back.

The few dresses selected by her were dark and serviceable, while she declined ordering any evening gowns at all. She could get them in Paris, she said, during the honeymoon—it would be something to do.

On the eve of the wedding-day, Rafe's solicitor, Mr. Salmons, came over with the settlements ready for signature; and the bride-elect, white and trembling, went into the library to bear her part in the proceedings. The lawyer looked at her curiously. She was making a brilliant match, and he had expected to see her cheeks red with excitement, her eyes sparkling with exultation, instead of which he beheld a silent little creature who seemed on the verge of tears, and only controlled herself by a great effort.

When he congratulated her she received his speech with downcast eyes, and murmured some unintelligible thanks.

Neither did the young Squire look his character of joyful bridegroom; his manner was perfectly composed, and he signed the various documents with a firm hand, but his face was stern, there was no levelling in the dark eyes, or smile on the compressed lips. The whole affair was conducted on the most business-like lines.

"Here is your birthday gift, Minna," he said, writing his name on the draft, and handing it to her.

Her face flushed as she took it. She held it irresolutely in her fingers for a few seconds, then she said,—

"But what must I do to change it into money?"

"Pay it into your banking account, and draw upon it as you require it."

"But, supposing I wanted to change it all at once! I would rather have money than this cheque, you know."

Rafe laughed at her naivete, and turned to the solicitor, still smiling.

"Ladies are very materialistic, you see, Mr. Salmons—they prefer hard cash, and don't believe in what they can't see. Miss Ferrers would rather I had given her this birthday gift in bags of sovereigns. She little knows how much a thousand pounds worth of gold weighs, and what a white elephant it would be to her if she had it! Still, if she really prefers having notes and gold in her actual possession, I suppose I must buy her a safe to keep it in, and let the question of interest slide. What do you say?"

"That it would be a great waste, Squire," drily responded Mr. Salmons.

"Yes, but ladies can't be expected to understand the mysteries of compound interest. Still, Minna,"—turning to her—"I am afraid you must forego the pleasure of handling your money until we return from our wedding tour. I really could not undertake the responsibility of dragging portmanteaus full of specie about with me."

But Minna did not even smile in response to his playfulness. Still holding the cheque in her hand, she stood facing the two men, an expression of desperate earnestness totally changing the character of her features. They both looked at her in amazement, and Clem, who was standing near, administered a slight shake by way of reminder.

"How foolish you are, Minna! What can you possibly want with money just now? Put the

cheque in the bank in your own name, and you can draw as much as you like when you come back."

Minna looked at her with a half-dazed expression, as if she had received some great shock.

Very slowly she folded the paper up, but the lawyer noticed that part of her awkwardness was due to the trembling of her fingers.

She walked to the window, and stood with her back to the other occupants of the room.

Presently Rafe went out for the purpose of getting a document which was in his study, and Clem took the opportunity of slipping off to the kitchen to give some orders which she had forgotten in the excitement of the wedding preparations. Minna, hearing them go, swept one hasty glance round, and came to the solicitor's side.

"Mr. Salmons, will you do me a great favour? I want this cheque changed into notes. Can you manage it for me?"

For a moment he hesitated, but her small white hand was on his arm, her pretty blue eyes full of pleading, were upraised to his.

There was something pathetic in her little nervous face, and the lawyer, who was by no means hard-hearted, was melted by it.

He could not see why this young lady on the eve of her marriage, need be in want of money; but, after all, if it was the case, it was no business of his, and she had every right to do what she liked with her own.

"I will manage it for you, Miss Ferrers. What sort of notes would you like?"

"I should like a hundred in five pound Bank of England notes, and the rest in fifties. But they must all be on the Bank of England, do you understand?"

He nodded intelligently.

"All right. Just put your name on the back of the cheque—your signature in full, please."

She obeyed, and though her fingers were still unsteady, the signature itself was firm enough. After blotting it, Mr. Salmons put the draft carefully away in his pocket-book.

"When do you want the notes, Miss Ferrers?"

"To-night."

"To-night! But that is impossible—or at least, almost impossible," he amended.

"No it is not. You are going to drive straight back to W—, and you will be there before the banks close."

"That is true. But even supposing I get the money, how am I to let you have it to-day?"

"By special messenger. It will cost a good deal, but I am willing to pay for it. At any price I must have the money before to-morrow."

She spoke with a feverish eagerness which made him look at her rather uneasily. There was some mystery here, and he began to be afraid Miss Ferrers was not quite the innocent and discreet little maiden he had always imagined her. Perhaps the Squire was not to be congratulated on his choice after all!

But it was too late to think of this now. Matters had gone too far for the wedding to be postponed.

"Very well," he said shortly. "If you must have the money, I suppose you must, and there is no more to be said about it."

She winced slightly at the change in his tone, but made no other sign of resentment.

"Only this," she added, softly, "that I want you to keep the matter secret. I have reasons for not wishing the Squire or my sisters to know anything about it until—after to-morrow."

Mr. Salmons left Westwood in a by no means enviable frame of mind.

He was not sure that he was doing right in acceding to the young lady's request, but he had promised, and there was an end of it. What could Minna Ferrers possibly want with all this money?

However it was sent to her, and Minna spent some time that evening sewing the notes securely inside the gown she intended travelling in. She had only just completed this task when Clematis entered her bedroom.

"Well, I think all the arrangements are finished now, and I must confess I am about tired out," she said, resting herself on an ottoman, and folding her hands in her lap. "I have been on my feet all day long. If so many preparations are required for a quiet wedding like yours, what



RUTH WAS AMAZED AT THE SUDDENNESS WITH WHICH THE STRANGE FIGURE DISAPPEARED.

must they be for a fashionable one! When it comes to Ruth's turn I shall go for a holiday I think."

"Poor Clem!" murmured Minna, kissing her. "You have been very good, you never spare yourself when it is a question of my happiness."

"No," said Clem, "I never do," and this was true. She had spared neither thought nor conscience in her desire to see her young sister safely married to Rafe.

"Well, I thank you Clem. If I have been naughty and tiresome in the past, I am very sorry for it. Will you forgive me?"

She was down on her knees by the elder woman's side, now, her face buried in Clem's lap. The attitude was an unusual one for her, as was the confession she had just made, but there was sincerity in both, and Clem, although not at all given to sentiment as a rule, felt a ridiculous moisture in her eyes as she recognized it.

"My dear, there is nothing to forgive. You are young, and sometimes wilful, that's all."

"Still, I want you to say you forgive me—for what I have done in the past, and for what I may do in the future. I shall feel more easy when you have said it."

In view of this persistence Clem could do nothing but yield.

"I forgive you dear child—yes, for anything you have done, or may do. You know, Minna you are the one person in the world I care for most, and if I can only see you happy, I shall rest content. You are more like my child than my sister—you were a more baby when mother put you in my arms, and begged me to love and cherish you, and do my best for you. I promised her I would, and I have tried to keep my promise."

Yes, according to her light Clem had been faithful to her given word.

Minna rose with a low sigh, and glanced round the room—at the trunks already packed, the bridal dress laid out on the couch, the handbag waiting for the last few articles to be put in.

"Don't you think you had better go to bed,

Clem? Surely there is no reason why you should sit up any longer."

The elder sister hesitated.

"I thought I should like to sleep with you to-night, Minna. It is the last time we shall be alone together."

But Minna looked absolutely alarmed at the proposal, and would not entertain it for a minute.

"It would be a mistake for both of us," she declared, "we should talk half the night, and neither get any sleep. No, you must go to your own room, and try to obtain a good night's rest, so as to be ready for to-morrow."

Seeing her thus insistent, Clem meekly submitted. When they said "good-night" Minna clung to her affectionately, and finally turned her out of the room, and locked the door behind her.

The next day Clem herself took in the cup of tea which Minna usually drank before she got up in the morning. It pleased her to do this little office for her sister, and a smile as nearly approaching sweetness as those thin lips could manage softened her face when she knocked at the door before entering the bedroom.

The summons remained unanswered. Minna must be still asleep, or so absorbed in thoughts as to be oblivious of outside things.

Clem opened the door and entered the room.

One glance sufficed to convince her that it was empty. Still in confusion, with many things strewn about, and a litter of odds and ends indicative of packing, on the floor, it bore all the signs of a hasty departure; the bed, too, had evidently not been slept in.

Clem put down the tray, a slow pallor creeping over her cheeks. A sudden misgiving—a presage of what was to follow, came upon her, and when she saw a little note, directed to herself, lying on the dressing-table, she almost guessed its contents before she opened it.

"Forgive me, Clem, for the sorrow and disappointment I am about to inflict upon you. I cannot marry Rafe for I do not love him, and I am going away to marry another man. I know I

have been wicked in deceiving you so long, but my temptation was very great—how great I can hardly tell you. Do not attempt to trace me, or induce me to come back. Perhaps in the future I may be able to give a full explanation of my conduct, but I can't do it now, and I can only beg you to think as gently of me as possible. As to Rafe—I hardly dare venture to ask his pardon; but in time he may grant it me,

"Your loving,

"MINNA."

Clem sat staring at it for a few minutes after reading the note, then in a sudden frenzy of impotent rage she tore it across and across, flung the pieces on the floor, and stamped on them.

At that moment her anger against Minna was very bitter—she could not accord her the pardon for which the poor child craved—she could do nothing but remember how she and Rafe had been fooled by this chit of a girl.

Afterwards there came the wonder as to who was the companion of her flight—the new lover who had taken Denis Marchant's place, and then Clem recalled a good many mysteries connected with Minna's behaviour.

Her anxiety regarding her birthday present, for example, was explained, for she had taken all the notes with her, although she had been careful to leave behind her jewels, and such presents as Rafe had lately given her in view of their approaching marriage.

That she must have had an accomplice who was a member of the household, and who had helped her in her plans, seemed pretty clear, but Clem was not able to discover his identity, any more than she was able to trace the misguided girl.

And so there was no wedding that day at Westwood, and Rafe, saying with a reckless laugh that though he had been cheated of his bride, he would not be cheated of his promised journey, left the house for a three months' tour, and was soon beyond hearing of the gossip that followed this nine days wonder.

(To be continued.)



ROSAMOND SMILED—SUCH A STRANGE, ODD SORT OF SMILE, THAT THE YOUNG MAN FELT PUZZLED.

THE ASPENDALE PROPERTY.

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CHAPTER III.

ASPENDALE PRIORY was in Westshire, a county, as its name implies, in the far west of England; so that Mr. Brown, whose home and business were in Essex, had made a considerable journey in his sister's interest. Truth to say, the dapper-looking little man, who had excited so much curiosity at the reading of Mrs. Aspendale's will, stood very much in awe of this sister. Maria was the eldest of the family, and had been brought up by a wealthy godmother, so that she gave herself airs, and, on her return home, ruled the younger ones with a rod of iron.

The second Mrs. Tempest was by no means an amiable woman, but one or two excuses might be urged for her tantrums (as her brother called her fits of temper), she had been educated far above her original position, and she had twice been just on the point of being rich, only to see the chance of fortune escape her.

To begin with, the godmother, before referred to, had promised to leave Maria all her money, but had made some legal flaw in her will which rendered the document so much waste paper; then later she was engaged to a very wealthy City man who intended to make most handsome settlements, but, unluckily for Maria, died within a week of the day fixed for the wedding. Having failed to make a marriage of interest, Maria turned her thoughts to one of inclination, and, meeting Claude Tempest, then enjoying a year's leave in England, she fell passionately in love with the fascinating young widower; accepted the offer of his hand, and sailed with him for an Indian home.

The marriage did not turn out so very badly. Maria was not a lady born, but she had acquired a certain amount of polish or veneer, which, excepting in moments of excitement, hid her natural vulgarity.

She was a good mother and a devoted wife, and

her stepson having been given up to his maternal grand parents she was not tried by seeing a rival to her own brood in her home.

She kept on the best of terms with Charles—by letter, be it understood—and when her husband sold out and they all came "home," she was amiability itself to her step-son; but, unluckily for Maria, her husband died before they had been long in England.

The price of his commission went to pay debts and other entanglements. The policy on his life brought in exactly two hundred a-year; and as, of course, Maria could not bring up eight children on such a pittance, she levied toll on her relations, taking a house near brother Ben, so that he might assist her when she outran the constable, and appealing to her stepson's generosity with such success that he agreed to allow her two hundred a-year, "till her children grew up." Some of them were grown up now, but Captain Tempest had made no sign of diminishing his allowance, and Maria was not the sort of woman to remind him of his intention.

Mrs. Tempest had heard from her husband the story of his happy boyhood at Aspendale Priory, and of the accident which turned his aunt against him.

Directly she became a widow, Maria wrote a begging letter to Mrs. Aspendale (of which that lady took no notice), and she never ceased to hope that the one rich relation her children possessed would yet do something for them.

When she saw the widow's death in the paper she wrote to inquire when the funeral would be, and sent her brother Ben to represent her.

"For my girls have as much claim on the old lady as anyone," she declared. "Charles has eight hundred a-year, besides his pay; what can a bachelor want with more?"

Benjamin Brown was on the border-land of gentility; that is, he was an auctioneer and land agent. Had his business been anywhere but in a small country town he might have got into society, but in Waldon, where everyone knew his origin, and most people had seen him in his pro-

fessional capacity knock down furniture to the highest bidder, Ben was only a tradesman. His sister, who lived in a very smart villa in the London-road, often doubted if she were wise to stay near so very unaristocratic a connection; but then the house was rent-free (being Ben's freehold property), her brother's garden supplied her with fruit and vegetables; his gig was always at her disposal, and the girls could always wheedle their soft-hearted uncle out of a five-pound note when they declared themselves to be shabby or hard-up. So, on the whole, Mrs. Tempest decided she was best off at Waldon.

The day after Mrs. Aspendale's funeral, the whole family were gathered in the little drawing-room—excepting the children at school—and the mother had put on a black dress much trimmed with bugles.

"It's just as well to remind people we are related to an old county family," she told her girls; "your uncle must be back to-night, and he is sure to look in and tell us the news."

"Mrs. Aspendale won't have left us anything," said Bertha, the eldest girl. "Why, mother, I don't suppose she knew of our existence."

"We are a great deal nearer to her than the family she adopted," said Mrs. Tempest; "we are her own flesh and blood (at least, you children are). The Hursts were only her husband's nieces."

Mr. Brown was so late that they had begun to despair of him. He came in with his ruddy face attuned to a doleful expression as became one fresh from a funeral, and kissed his sister and her girls in solemn silence.

"You'd better tell me at once," said Maria, sharply. "Has the old lady done her duty, and remembered my children?"

"She has not left them or you the value of a shilling."

"What a shame!"

"It's a splendid place," said Mr. Brown, warning with professional enthusiasm; "if the things in that library were brought to the hammer they'd be worth an enormous sum. There's some

of the finest carved oak I've ever seen, and the old china and bronzes in the hall would make a connoisseur's mouth water."

"And those Hursts get it all," said Mrs. Tempest, spitefully, "they must have played their cards well."

"They don't get a shilling, or their mother either. They'll have to turn out of the Priory as soon as possible. I felt quite sorry for them after living there so many years."

"But I understood Mrs. Aspendale was devoted to them."

"It seems she wanted the eldest girl to marry a Baronet, whose estate joined the Priory, and the young lady didn't see it. I had the story pat from a man in the train. I expect she didn't think of all it would lose her."

"Then who has the property?" demanded his sister; "don't say she has gone and left everything to a charity. It would be wicked, such a property as that!"

"The charity wouldn't think it wicked, Maria," chuckled Mr. Brown; "the Priory's worth twenty thousand a year. The furniture, plate, jewels, and ornaments must represent a good round sum, and the old lady hasn't spent half her income for over thirty years, so the savings alone are worth a small fortune, and it all goes to one man, your stepson, Charles Tempest!"

"What!"

"Every acre of land, every stick of furniture, and every shilling of money—after a few legacies are paid—go straight to the Captain."

"Why in the world didn't you say so before!" reproved his sister; "so long as Charles is unmarried he will want me to keep house for him. Of course, he'll leave the army at once and settle at the Priory. I can bring out the girls; and, with their good looks, they are sure to marry well, and Charles's not mean. I will say that for him he'd not grudge them a modest portion. On the whole, Ben, I think Mrs. Aspendale's will a first-rate thing for us."

Mr. Brown hesitated.

"Some people there were saying the Captain ought to do something for Mrs. Hurst and her daughters," he remarked rather lamely.

"Oh, that's nonsense," said Maria, decidedly; "if dear Aunt Mary (how in the world had she got hold of Mrs. Aspendale's Christian name?) had wanted them to have anything she would have left it them outright. I do hope no one will put any Quixotic notions into Charles's head. He has suffered quite enough already. The Hursts have done him and his father harm enough by keeping them away from the Priory all these years. He needn't trouble his head about them now."

Mr. Brown looked a little sheepish.

"They're good-looking girls, both of them, Maria, and the eldest is proud enough for a peeress. The Captain will want a wife if he settles down in the country, and if he chooses one of his cousins, it would be a kind of make-up for what they've lost."

"If ever you say such a thing again, Ben, I'll quarrel with you on the spot," said his sister. "Charles hates young ladies, and has said so over and over again. So long as he is unmarried the girls and I will have a home at the Priory, but if he once took a wife we should be nowhere. I beg you won't even mention to him that you thought the Hursts good-looking."

"He'll find that out for himself, if he has eyes," chuckled Mr. Brown. "They're the prettiest girls he'll meet in a day's journey."

"Of course they will have left the Priory," said Mrs. Tempest decidedly, "long before Charlie comes home."

"Well," said the man of business, "the lawyer will write to him by next mail, and a letter's only twenty-one days going. Then, say he took a week to get leave of absence, and sailed at the end of it—he'd be here in seven weeks."

"Seven weeks! No ladies with proper pride would remain in a stranger's house half that time."

"I don't know," returned Benjamin, doggedly. "They've lived there for years, and they never expected to have to leave, so of course they have no plans. Then they might argue that while Captain Tempest was in India, he couldn't

really want the house, and so they did no harm in taking their own time about removing."

Maria Tempest had a vivid imagination—women of her type often have. In fancy's eye she perceived Charles reaching the Priory to find it still occupied by the Hursts, and succumbing at once to their beauty, in which case she and her girls would profit little by his being Mrs. Aspendale's heir. She might talk glibly enough of her stepson detesting women, but she knew perfectly that men who pride themselves on being adamant to the fair sex are the very first to succumb to the charms of some special siren.

She set her teeth together in a vice, and said snappishly,—

"I'll see to that. Unless I am very much mistaken, the Hursts will have left the Priory before Charles sails for England."

She wrote to her stepson the next day, and her letter was a most skilful blending of fact and fiction. She told the Captain of the wonderful good fortune which had befallen him, and then went on to say everyone knew Mrs. Aspendale had meant to leave her property to the Hursts, but their shameful conduct had so distressed and grieved the poor old lady, at the eleventh hour she had secretly sent for a lawyer, and, unknown to her relations, had made the will which destroyed their hopes.

It was a very clever letter. No specific charge was made, but the impression given by it was that Mrs. Aspendale had been a kind of state prisoner in the hands of her nieces, who were more like her gaolers than her guests. That she, being in weak health, had been held in thralldom by three strong, able-bodied women, who kept her aloof from all her old friends, and suffered her to see no one but themselves and their tools.

Leaving this subject, Mrs. Tempest went on to tell Charles of the very delicate state (purely imaginary this) of her daughter Lotty, and how the doctor had declared she must, at any cost, spend the rest of the spring in some milder place than Waldon, which was very bleak and exposed.

Mrs. Tempest pleaded that Westshire would be new life to Lotty. If Charles cabled as soon as he got her letter, she would have his message by the latter end of March, and could take her child to the Priory at once. One word would be sufficient to tell her they were welcome. Of course, not being his own mother (though she hoped one in affection) she should not dream of establishing herself in his house without his consent.

The letter did its work. Charles Tempest's blood boiled as he read it, and thought of his unknown great-aunt, frail and aged, a prisoner in her own house, and quite helpless, at the mercy of those who for whom she had done so much.

As a boy he had heard Mrs. Aspendale's story from his grandfather, and had always felt a pity for the lonely woman whose only son had been taken from her so suddenly.

The bequest pleased him—no man could hear without pleasure that he was master of a fair estate and large rent-roll—but he was in no hurry to take possession of his new property. He at once decided not to apply for leave, but to send in his papers, and only return to England when the necessary steps had been taken and he was no longer a soldier.

Expense was no object to him and so the cablegram he sent his step-mother, far from the "one word" she had requested, was long and clear,—

"Take Lotty to Priory at once. Not home till June."

Mrs. Tempest was delighted. If Charles had come at the earliest possible chance, she might have had some difficulty in preventing a meeting with the Hursts, even though they had left the Priory. Now she had the game in her own hands.

She had made careful inquiries through a Westshire lawyer, who not having been employed by Mrs. Aspendale, was quite ready to take instructions from the new family, and she had ascertained that the Hursts were still at the Priory, that so far nothing whatever was known of their future plans, and they appeared to be making no preparations for removal.

This being so, Mrs. Tempest decided on prompt action, and the note she presently despatched to Mrs. Hurst, though outwardly civil, was so full of veiled insult, that she felt sure if the lady to whom it was addressed had a spark of pride she would not remain long at the Priory after receiving it.

"Mrs. Tempest presents her compliments, and begs to say that her son, Captain Tempest, the master of Aspendale Priory, having placed that house at her disposal, she would be glad to take possession of it at the earliest possible opportunity. Mrs. Tempest has no wish to hurry Mrs. Hurst unduly, but she has a delicate daughter, to whom it is of the utmost moment to remove at once to the mild climate of Westshire. Mrs. Tempest would have written sooner, only she has been expecting daily to hear that her son's house was empty. Four weeks seem to Mrs. Tempest amply sufficient time in which to vacate a stranger's home."

She sealed it carefully and put it into the post with her own hands, triumphing over the dismay she expected it to strike into the minds of the Hursts.

Yet Maria Tempest was not a cruel woman or even a heartless one, but her affection was centred in her own children, and for their sakes she meant to try and keep her step-son unmarried. Had no one told her of the beauty of Rosamond and Moira, had her brother never hinted that Charles might choose one of them for his wife, the chances are that Lotty Tempest would not have needed a milder climate than Waldon, and that the cruel letter just transcribed would never have been sent to Aspendale Priory.

CHAPTER IV.

TIME is a relative matter, and long or short chiefly according to our own feelings.

To Mrs. Tempest, pausing for the moment when she could take possession of her step-son's new property, four weeks of waiting seemed an infinite space; but to the Hursts four weeks in which to leave the home where they had been so happy, and make a new plan of existence, were intolerably short.

Honestly, poor things, they had not the faintest idea that they were unduly delaying their departure, or that Captain Tempest might think they lingered too long in his house.

Mr. Carley—who heard of the inquiries made for Mrs. Tempest by his rival practitioner—did his best to give them a hint, but real regard for the poor ladies prevented his speaking very plainly, and his mild remark that "long drawn out partings were painful," and his offer to look for a small house for them in any locality they might select alike proved fruitless.

"You see," Rosamond said gravely, "moving is so expensive; we must be quite sure a place will suit us before we go there, and mother is still very weak and depressed. I should like her to get a little stronger before we leave the dear old Priory."

"And Captain Tempest can't want the house yet. Why, if he started directly he got your letter, Mr. Carley, he couldn't be here for more than six weeks after Aunt Mary's funeral; and, of course, he couldn't start at a minute's notice. He would have things to arrange, and all. I am sure we are quite safe for another month."

This was Moira's decision, and Mr. Carley felt unable to make his warning plainer, and so gave up the task.

Really the girls had not the slightest idea of sponging on Captain Tempest. They were so used to attention and kindness from all their gentlemen friends, it never struck them the man who had profited so largely by their misfortune could grudge them shelter, and they really had a great deal to do.

First their mother had been ill. She caught a chill the day of the funeral, and what with grief (genuine) for Mrs. Aspendale, and utter despair at her children's prospects, she was a long time in throwing it off. Then came the task of selecting such possessions as they might take with them; but these, alas! proved very few.

Aspendale Priory had been so richly furnished with all that anyone could desire, very few additions had been made by the old lady for the sake of her nieces; and, beyond a piano, the whole contents of the sisters' own sanctum, and a quantity of books and ornaments, there was little, Mr. Carley could fairly advise the unfortunate ladies to claim as their own. These articles were removed to Weston—the county town—to be sold at the first auction held there; for, as Rosamond sensibly said, the money would be far more useful to them than furniture too grand for their new position, or ornaments which would recall at every moment all they had lost.

But all this took time; and so, though they had discussed the future till their hearts ached, and had thought over plans till they could hardly sleep at night from anxiety, they had settled nothing.

Rosamond had just remarked that they really must decide on something soon, for Captain Tempest might reach England in a month, and Mrs. Hurst had replied languidly, no gentleman would think of hurrying them; and anyone with proper feeling would place the Priory at their disposal for a full year after Mrs. Aspendale's death, when the old butler brought in the letters, and all unsuspecting of the blow in store for Selina Hurst selected her own special share and gave the girls one solitary envelope apiece which was all their portion.

A stifled cry of indignation made both the sisters look up in alarm; their mother sat with a blank, troubled face; a hunted expression in her pretty faded eyes which they had never seen before, even on the day when they learned the Priory had gone from them.

"Mamma," cried Moira, "what is the matter? Oh! surely there can't be any fresh trouble!"

Rosamond put her strong young arms round Mrs. Hurst, and said, tenderly,—

"Only tell us what is wrong, dear, and we will find a way out of the trouble. Oh! don't cry so!" for Mrs. Hurst's self-command broke down, and she began to sob hysterically.

"Read it," moaned the poor creature; "read it for yourselves. . . . Oh, that any people should be so cruel! It is hard enough to have to leave the Priory, but to be insulted! . . ."

Rosamond caught up the sheet of paper which had fallen from her mother's limp hand to the ground.

Her lip curled scornfully as she read the note on which Mrs. Tempest had spent so much trouble.

"The Master of the Priory!" she repeated, contemptuously. "A pretty master he must be to allow his mother to offer such an insult to three helpless women. 'Of moment to her daughter to be in a milder climate!' Rubbish! With Captain Tempest's income, his whole family could go to Madeira or Italy at a moment's notice. The woman is a vulgar, ill-bred vixen, and her son must be either as bad as she is, or else some mean, cowardly wretch, so much under her thumb he dare not have a will of his own."

"It is his house," said Moira, sadly; "but I never thought four weeks a long time for us to decide our whole future."

"It is not long!" said Rosamond, passionately. "But these ill-bred vulgarians want to gloat over their new possessions, and don't mind how they insult us. Why, when a clergyman dies his wife and family are left in undisturbed possession of the Vicarage or Rectory, for six weeks."

The cases were not precisely similar, and she was not quite correct in her facts, but the outburst did her good.

"And he owes it all to you," said Moira, "if you hadn't been too noble to marry for money, Captain Tempest would never have had a chance at the Priory."

"Don't," cried Rosamond hoarsely. "Do you know just for a moment I wished I had promised to marry Roger. Just for your sake and mother's."

"Never say that again," pleaded Moira. "I would rather starve in a garret than that you should have bound yourself to a life of misery, and so would mummy."

Mrs. Hurst kissed her children fondly, but she did not endorse Moira's last speech, poor woman, she had seen so much more of the seamy side of life than her daughters, that perhaps it was natural she looked at the future more anxiously than they did, and not being of a romantic disposition Sir Roger Bailey had appeared to her a most desirable suitor.

"There is only one thing for it," said Rosamond, decidedly. "We must leave the Priory to-day. We won't put it in that woman's power to insult us a second time."

"But where are we to go?" asked Mrs. Hurst in dismay, "and we have not even begun to pack."

"If we get off by daylight we need not go far to-night," returned Rosamond. "We will put up at the Railway Hotel at Weston, and go on by train to-morrow."

"Hotels are expensive," hazarded Moira.

"Never mind. We won't sleep another night in Captain Tempest's house whatever it costs us. Moira, if you and mother can begin the packing, (two of the maids will help you) I will go to Weston and see Mr. Carley. He may be able to tell us when the things will be sold."

They had so little ready money, so painfully small a balance at the bank, that really it was necessary to know whether they would have more funds before they went out into the world.

Mr. Carley looked very grave when he read Mrs. Tempest's letter, but he attempted to defend the absent Captain.

"His stepmother must feel very sure of his upholding her or she wouldn't write like that," retorted Rosamond. "I expect he is as bad as she is!"

"You see," observed the lawyer, almost apologetically. "Mrs. Tempest is very poor. Of her own she only possesses two hundred a-year; but for help from her brother and the Captain she never could have managed to bring up her children. It may have seemed hard to her all these years that Mrs. Aspendale, their own blood relation, ignored them."

"That's no reason she should vent it on us," said Rosamond. And then she dropped her indignant tone and came to the real object of her visit. Could Mr. Carley give her any idea when the furniture and ornaments they were trying to sell would be disposed of?

Mr. Carley said he was just going to write to her on the subject. A private purchaser had offered three hundred pounds for the things as they stood. He should really advise Mrs. Hurst to close with it.

"But that is more than you said."

"Well, Miss Rosamond, you know the piano is a Collard and cost a hundred and fifty guineas. Then some of the ornaments are very valuable. I was afraid to lead you to expect too much, but three hundred pounds is really not at all out of the way."

And Rosamond accepted the offer in her mother's name, never troubling to inquire who was the purchaser, but supposing it was someone newly furnishing who desired a bargain. When Mr. Carley offered to advance the purchase money she accepted thankfully, but when he asked their plans she confessed they had formed none.

"I assure you," said the lawyer, "that I do not believe Captain Tempest had a hand in the rudeness offered you. I knew his father well, and I can't think his son would be guilty of such an insult. As soon as Captain Tempest comes to England I shall make it my business to tell him how Mrs. Aspendale dishonoured you in a moment of pique, and I feel confident he will gladly make your mother an allowance from his estate. A thousand a-year would be nothing to him, while it would at least save you from hardships."

"I know you mean kindly," replied the girl; "but I must beg you not to mention us to Captain Tempest. We could not live on charity, least of all on that of a man who has insulted us."

"For your mother's sake?" he urged.

"You can call and ask her opinion," said Rosamond, sweetly. "We shall sleep at the

Railway Hotel to-night. Call to-morrow about twelve."

And when he did so this letter was put into his hands.

"DEAR MR. CARLEY,—

"Mother and Moira think as I do, that we couldn't accept any thing from that odious man. We fear your kind feeling for us might make you ask him to help us, and so we are leaving Weston without seeing you again. Don't think us ungrateful for all your goodness. Someday when our disappointment is not so fresh and we have settled down to a new way of life I hope that we may meet again. Till then adieu,—Yours gratefully,

"ROSAMOND HURST."

"Well!" exclaimed the much-tried lawyer, when relating the flight of the Hursts to a favourite client, "last week I told you your giving three hundred pounds for those things was Quixotic generosity; but now, Sir Roger, I'm positively thankful that you did so. At least those helpless women have a little money between them and starvation."

Sir Roger sighed.

"I wanted Rosamond to take my legacy from Mrs. Aspendale, but she would not hear of it. Mr. Carley you are sure soon to have their address. Will you promise to send it to me? I only wish you had let me put another hundred on the cheque."

"Miss Rosamond would have suspected something. She's as sharp as a needle. I'll let you know at once Sir Roger if I hear from them."

Rosamond was the master spirit of the luckless trio. Moira was too much a creature of smiles and tears to be the leader of any enterprise. Where her sister went she followed, suffering her own common-sense (she possessed far more than her sister) to be overruled by Rosamond's opinion.

Mrs. Hurst made but one suggestion as to their future course. When she saw the cheap lodgings in Bloomsbury, which were the best abode the girls dared to indulge in considering their poverty, she said faintly.

"Dears, it may be foolish pride, but I shouldn't like anyone who knew us at the dear old Priory to guess we had fallen so low. Rosamond, don't you think we might give the landlady some other name?"

"What shall it be?" asked Rosamond. "She'll be back directly."

Mrs. Hurst had purposely asked for a glass of water to secure a moment alone with her daughters.

"Anything," she answered indifferently. "Martin. That was your father's Christian name."

So Mrs. Martin and her two daughters took up their abode in the dull Bloomsbury side street, and Rosamond tried to solve the problem of how they were to live—or exist—on eighty pounds a-year, which would be the amount of their resources when Mr. Carley's cheque was exhausted.

They had none of them been used to work. Both the girls were fairly accomplished, but neither had certificates; and, besides, the question of references would have been a fatal difficulty also had they tried to teach. Poor things! they wanted to be together.

Possibly either of the sisters might have earned twenty pounds a year as mother's help, but neither was specially fond of children. Even Rosamond's spirits were drooping, when suddenly a bright idea came to her.

"Moira," she said one morning at breakfast (Mrs. Martin took that meal in bed), "Why shouldn't we let lodgings?"

"We've no furniture and no house to put it in," returned Moira, "or else we might try. I am sure," with a disdainful glance round the room, "if we have to pay Mrs. Gibbs thirty shillings a week for three small rooms and an apology for attendance, really nice apartments in a lady's house ought to bring in a lot."

"Listen," cried Rosamond, brandishing the *Daily Telegraph*, as she read aloud,—

"To be sold at once the furniture and good-

will of a small lodging-house at the sea-side. Extensive marine views, house well-situated and airy. Long lease at low rent. No reasonable offer refused.—Apply to A.B., Adelaide House, Netherton-on-Sea.

"Where in the world is Netherton?" demanded Moira who had never heard of it.

"It's a new place on the East coast. Don't you remember last year an old lady came to see Aunt Mary, and declared a month at Netherton had made her ten years younger?"

"No, I don't," said Moira frankly, "and I hate the East coast; but—summer in London will be awful. It's only the middle of April now, so we should be in time for the Netherton season. If we had enough money for the undertaking we might get a living out of it."

"I shall go to Netherton to-day. There's nothing like personal inquiry."

"Shall you tell Mummy?"

"Not till I come back. The house may be a regular pig-sty, and Netherton a wilderness, or else the place beyond our means."

But Rosamond took a great fancy to Netherton even though—as the season hardly begun till June—it was nearly empty. It was a bright sunny little place, with a bay, whose water was as blue as could be, while the cloudless sky was delightful after the dull leaden hue of the same sky as seen in Bloomsbury.

Netherton was very new. The proprietress of Adelaide House confessed that ten years before there had not been half-a-dozen houses in the place; but it had sprung up rapidly. There was a pier, a library, a church, fine golf links, first-rate sea baths, decent shops, and many other advantages.

"Doctors have taken to send rheumatic people here all the year round," explained Mrs. Mead; "but our chief season is June to October. I like the place, and I'm sorry to leave it; but my daughter's to be married at Easter, and she wants me to go and live with her in Ireland."

The house was quaint and pretty, double-fronted and detached, with a verandah running round three sides; it looked, too, like the abode of gentle folks.

Rosamond made a few inquiries as to the price paid by lodgers, and then, with her heart in her mouth, asked how much Mrs. Mead would take for the furniture, fixtures, goodwill, and lease.

"Two hundred pounds," was the quick reply, made so promptly that Rosamond felt sure the sum had been carefully debated and finally indisputably fixed; "and there's an agent in the town would give me three quarters of the sum down to-morrow; but I know he'd make a pretty penny out of it, and I don't see why I shouldn't have the advantage myself."

Two hundred pounds! They could just do it, and have a year's rent and taxes in hand, with Mrs. Huret's small annuity to fall back on till lodgers came.

Rosamond secured the refusal of Adelaide House, and was wending her way back to the station when she missed the turning, and lost herself in a labyrinth of new private roads. There was nothing for it but to explain her mischance to the first passer-by, and ask to be directed.

Fate made that passer-by a man and a young one. He looked up at the question, and Rosamond thought he had the handsomest face she had ever seen.

"It is the third turning to the right and the first to the left. The Netherton roads are so much alike strangers often lose their way. I am going to the station myself if you would allow me to act as guide."

Rosamond hesitated.

"I would not suggest it," he said, pleasantly, "but there is only just enough time to catch the next train comfortably, and after that there is nothing for three hours. You see the season hasn't begun yet."

"I should be very grateful," said Rosamond, "I am anxious to catch the three o'clock train, only I did not like troubling you."

So they walked on together. The stranger bled of many things, and talked well. He was a perfect gentleman Rosamond decided, for he behaved just as though they had been properly

introduced, and it was the most natural thing in the world for them to walk together.

"I am only going on to the junction," he said, as they neared the station. "I have an uncle living there, and I am going to stay with him. I know Netherton pretty well and can recommend it to you if you want a quiet seaside place."

"Do many people come in the summer?"

"Lots . . . and nice people, you know; not cheap trippers, there is nothing to attract them."

"Have you ever stayed in Netherton?"

"Never. You see my uncle is so near, I haven't needed to; but I often recommend it to my friends. Besides the visitors—there is a fair sprinkling of residents. You would find some very nice society if you came here for any time."

Rosamond smiled—such a strange odd sort of smile that the young man felt puzzled.

"You don't believe me!"

"I believe there may be very nice society here; but I should not be in it if I came!"

And with this enigmatical remark they reached the station. The stranger raised his hat, and turned in the direction of the bookstall.

Rosamond looked at the time-tables and a dozen uninteresting advertisements, then the train came bustling in, and she took her place in a third-class carriage, only to see her late companion esconce himself comfortably in a first.

"If we come here I must remember we have lost caste. That man treated me as an equal. If mother takes Adelaide House I shall be nothing but 'the landlady's daughter.' Oh, how I hate being poor, it eats into my very soul; and yet, through it all, I'm thankful I didn't marry Roger. At least I have my freedom."

But freedom did not seem a very valuable possession judging from the bitter tears Rosamond shed behind her black veil as the slow parliamentary train bore her tardily back to London.

(To be continued.)

PAYING THE PENALTY.

CHAPTER XIII.—(continued.)

"I WONDER if I gave her a strong enough dose! A few grains more will not hurt."

She returned to the bedside, and a few more flakes fluttered down upon the sleeping girl's lips; then the beautiful adventuress hurried noiselessly from the room, closing the door after her.

Daphne had got back to the station on the pilfered bicycle ere Aunt Marion reached the farmhouse. There was a station some ten miles further down the road, and it occurred to her that it would be wisest to get upon the train there. When within a short distance of her destination she dismounted from the wheel, left it in the underbrush, and walked on to the station.

To her great relief she found there was a train coming. It stopped, and she quickly entered it, no one noticing who she was or whether she went in the wee sma' hours of the morning.

When Aunt Marion returned home she went quietly to her room, stepping on tip-toe across the floor that she might not awaken Rachel.

Poor Rachel had retired with a headache. Her last words had been—

"Be sure to let me know if Daphne decides to leave to-night."

As Marion expected, she was deeply grieved that she had not been awakened.

"I wonder that Daphne could have left me like this," she sobbed, under her breath.

"I shouldn't grieve myself to death about someone who did not care anything about me, if I were you. Dry your tears. You will be all the happier, now that she is gone. Paul will come over this evening. He must not see you with tear-swollen eyelids. You did everything in your power to make Daphne's stay pleasant. You have nothing to reflect upon. Now try to forget any unpleasantness about her not bidding you farewell. Perhaps she imagined that there would be a scene," said Aunt Marion, consolingly.

"A great many people hate to say 'good-bye' to those who love them. Come, be a good girl and cheer up."

Rachel dried her tears, but her heart was still very heavy.

To the great surprise of everyone in the household, Paul did not put in an appearance at Willow Farm that night. It was the first evening that he had absented himself from the farm since Rachel and himself had been engaged. When the long hours of the evening wore away, and still he did not come, the heart in Rachel's bosom seemed to slowly break.

"There is no attraction for him here, now that Daphne is gone," the girl thought.

While she was sitting there, the sound of carriage wheels broke in upon her reverie.

It was a lad from the village with a message for Rachel.

"My uncle is dead," began the short note. "Will you come over to the house at once? You are wanted particularly, Rachel. Your aunt can accompany you."

"Yours, in sorrow and great haste,
"PAUL."

"His uncle is dead!" said Rachel, nervously.

"Oh, Aunt Marion, I knew there was some good reason for Paul not coming over here to-night!" cried the girl, tremulously. She was so nervous that she could scarcely tie on her hat. "Poor old gentleman!" she sighed piteously. "I am so sorry to hear about it. I did not know him very well, but I always took such an interest in him, and was so glad to hear that he was better. I am sure Paul was not expecting it. He spoke only the other day of the great improvement which his uncle was making."

It was Mr. Walton who met her at the door instead of Paul Verrell.

"Welcome, Miss Hilton," he said, in his slow, impressive way. "I sent for you to be present at the reading of the will. It is to be read over his coffin, and you are one of the interested parties."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE words uttered by the great lawyer puzzled Rachel. Of course she was interested in anything that concerned Paul, and that was certainly what he meant.

He took the girl by the hand and led her into the darkened room, where she saw a tall figure bending over a long black object in the bay-window.

She knew it was Paul. She lumped forward holding out her hand in a hesitating way.

"I am so sorry for you," she said. "I wish I only knew how to say something to comfort you."

Paul held the hand she extended to him only for a instant, then let it fall. He muttered a few words. She had never known him act so strangely before. The very tone of his voice seemed changed; but his sorrow must have caused that.

She sat down quietly, looking piteously over at the long dark object in the bay-window.

A moment later and the family servants entered. Two other gentlemen came quietly into the room and seated themselves near Rachel, Mr. Walter following a few moments later with a package of papers in his hand.

"It was the desire of the deceased that his last will and testament should be read over his coffin," commenced the lawyer, impressively, "and I shall herewith proceed to read it."

He read on and on the preliminary sentences, Rachel listening, but little dreaming how vitally important every line was to her. Then came the closing words—

"The balance of my estate, both real and personal, I hereby bequeath to Rachel Hilton, particularly requesting that no part of it shall pass into the hands of my nephew, Paul Verrell."

A cry broke from the girl's lips. Paul sat as still as though he was an image carved in marble. With a sob that seemed to

come from the very depths of her heart, Rachel came and flung herself at his feet.

"Do not grieve, Paul," she said. "I will not touch a penny of it—no, not for the whole world. It is yours, and yours alone."

He looked at her with heavy laden eyes.

"No, no, Rachel," he said, "I would not have it. It is yours, and everything is as it should be. I—I am not worthy of it."

Mr. Walton came quickly to the girl's side and raised her up.

"You are going against the dead man's wishes," he said. "Pray do not speak in this way. He meant that everything should be yours."

Marion Lee bent over her niece, whispering in her ear,—

"Don't you know what is yours will be Paul's soon?"

A beautiful light crept into Rachel's face. Ah, she had quite forgotten that in her excitement. She looked at Paul. Of course *he* understood it. She would make no demur; she would take it for his sake.

"You are a very rich young woman," said the lawyer, congratulating her. "I hope you will use the wealth wisely. It is not every young woman who finds herself an heiress so unexpectedly. The money is left in trust for you until you are twenty-one. You are not more than nineteen, I should say, at present."

"I am just nineteen, sir," she answered.

It was the lawyer, instead of Paul, who saw the ladies to the carriage in waiting; and again Rachel made excuses for Paul, saying that it was his grief over his uncle's death that made him seem so strange and unlike himself.

Aunt Marion was fairly jubilant all the way home.

"I can scarcely believe the good fortune that has come to you, Rachel," she said, kissing the girl and sobbing over her by turns. "Why, it reads like one of the novels that summer people bring out here with them. Why, all his money left to you, instead of to his nephew! That shows that he thought you would make a good wife for Paul. It is a great thing for a young girl to be so well liked by her intended's relatives. He can never say to you, 'You were a poor girl when I married you.' So many rich young men throw that in the faces of the girls they marry if they happen to be poor. But Paul can never say that to you, for you are a rich heiress, and he a poor, struggling young lawyer."

"How very strangely Paul acted, Aunt Marion."

"No one can wonder at it, under the circumstances. His uncle was old and eccentric, but he loved him very dearly; every one knew that."

Still Rachel did not feel quite satisfied. It seemed to her that something was wrong with Paul; she could not exactly tell what it was.

He did not come to Willow Farm that night or the next. She waited a whole week for him to come, but when he did not make an appearance, she put aside her maidenly dignity and wrote a note to him, sending it over by her uncle Andrew.

In it she asked Paul to be sure and come over that evening to her house. She was greatly worried about him.

"No doubt he will drive over with your uncle Andrew," said Marion.

She was very much surprised, as was also Rachel, when the farmer returned without Paul. He was not diplomatic enough to break the news gently.

"Paul has left the village," he said; "and they do not think he will ever return."

He uttered the words gently, but that did not lessen the pain of them.

Rachel's face had grown white as death.

His words seemed to strike her as lightning strikes a fair flower and blights it. She threw up her hands and fell at his feet.

"You have killed her, Andrew!" cried Marion.

"Why didn't you come in and tell me! You men are always so blunt. You must surely have made a mistake. Paul can't have gone."

Suddenly she bent over the girl's prostrate form and looked at her.

"Do you think, Andrew," she said in an awful voice, "that he could have gone with that—that Daphne?"

"You've hit it!" exclaimed Andrew; "that's the very thought that came in my mind when you spoke. I wouldn't say nuthin' more to her about Paul Verrell, if I were you, Marion. It wouldn't do any good, and p'raps it might do considerable harm. It strikes me that the old gentleman knew more than most people, when he left all of his money to Rachel. She is young, and she will get over it."

"Never!" answered Marion. "When a girl like Rachel loves, it is the love of a life-time. If Paul has indeed deserted her, despite all the wealth that she has inherited, life will never be the same to her."

It was a nine-days' wonder in the village when the story of old Mr. Verrell's will was whispered about, and then the whispers grew bolder, ending in open gossip.

Paul had eloped with the beautiful stranger and left his fiancé. Everyone felt sorry for Rachel, and there were some who recalled the picnic, the church, and numerous other occasions, where Paul had been so openly devoted to the lovely stranger, and said that they had expected it to turn out that way.

Many a woman had warned Rachel at the time; but then, when a lover chooses to prove false, what can a girl do, no matter if she is warned!

But then everyone declared that it was a good thing she had found out his perfidy in time. As a usual thing, girls are jealous when one of their number falls heir to a big fortune; but there was not one among them who could feel envious toward sweet Rachel Hilton.

For a fortnight Rachel's life was despaired of, just as Aunt Marion had prophesied. Her disease baffled the doctors. They said to themselves that it was a case of grief, and no doctor could cure a mind diseased. They must go away and travel with her. A little while at the seaside would be beneficial.

The country doctor meant well enough, but he was far from knowing the true malady which was making such insidious inroads and completely undermining the girl's health.

Aunt Marion and Andrew did not attempt to combat the doctor's wishes.

They were frightened enough to see the girl fade away before their very eyes, the roses leave her cheeks, her lips grow colourless, and their anxiety deepened day after day.

"We don't know much about fashionable life, but I reckon as we'll have to go," said Aunt Marion. "We must get someone to run the farm and pack up at once."

Andrew made no demur, though it was just like tearing the heart out of his bosom to leave the old farm where he was born and raised; but he loved the girl so well that he could not refuse.

Rachel did not seem to take much interest in whether she went or stayed. The anxiety into which she had fallen grew alarming. She never once mentioned the name of Paul, but they could tell that he was never out of her thoughts one moment by night or by day.

It was a very strange trio that stepped into the hotel at Seacombe a few days later.

"No wonder the hotel clerk looked in amazement at the fussy old countryman rigged out in his Sunday best, the grim, hard-faced woman, and the young girl, fair as a poet's dream, who accompanied them when they applied for rooms."

"There is certainly a mystery here," mused the clerk. "She cannot surely belong to them," he thought in puzzled wonder. "Why, the girl has the face of a houri. I shouldn't wonder one bit but that they brought her here against her will, she acts so sadly."

When they ordered her meals to be brought to her room the clerk's suspicions were aroused more than ever.

"I certainly ought to speak to a detective about it," he thought.

The affair troubled the clerk so that at the close of the following week he spoke to the proprietor about it.

"I will set inquiries at once," returned that

gentleman. "You did right to consult me. There is certainly something wrong."

CHAPTER XV.

MEANWHILE, much to Aunt Marion's alarm Rachel grew weaker. One day she called her aunt to her.

"There has been something on my mind for a week," she said. "Promise me that you will not feel badly, and I will tell you what it is."

The poor woman guessed intuitively what was coming, and shrank from the words.

"I am afraid I am not getting well very fast," continued Rachel, "and I want you to send for a lawyer. If anything should happen to me, I want the fortune which I have inherited to be divided equally between Paul and yourself, Aunt Marion. Daphne will not need it, as she will inherit Aunt Kesterton's money, you know."

Although Aunt Marion tried to talk her out of the notion, Rachel was firm, and in the end had her way. A lawyer was summoned, and the matter was adjusted in accordance with Rachel's wishes.

It does not take much to work up a mystery among a number of summer boarders who are ripe for gossip, and, much to the proprietor's annoyance, the news soon spread through the hotel that a young and lovely girl was kept a prisoner in the place, and that although great efforts had been made to see her face, every attempt had been futile, as she was kept closely guarded.

This was the story that greeted the ears of Claude Endon, a young Londoner, who was staying at Seacombe at the time. At first he had laughed at the story, but somehow it troubled him, he could not tell why, and he determined to investigate the matter for himself.

After several futile attempts to see the strange, mysterious occupant of Room 34, a novel idea occurred to him. He would change places with the waiter—those fellows would do anything for money—and no one would be any the wiser.

Claude's room was at the end of the hall, opposite the apartments of the beautiful girl about whom clung such a mystery.

It was but the work of a moment to take the tray from the waiter as he approached, trusting to luck that no one saw him.

In answer to his knock, Aunt Marion said, in her sharp, querulous voice,—

"Come in!"

It was with the utmost suspense that Claude set down the tray, and looked about him.

"I am sorry that you have brought me so much," said a sweet, musical voice, "for I cannot eat anything."

Claude Endon looked up, and to the last day of his life he never forgot the rare beauty of the face upon which his eyes rested.

Rachel was standing by the lace-draped window, the fleecy folds of the curtain falling about her like a bridal veil. He saw a small, beautifully shaped head crowned with rings of raven hair, a face pale as sculptured marble, and a pair of luminous dark eyes that ever afterward haunted him.

He set down the tray awkwardly enough, this handsome young son of a millionaire, who was playing the part of waiter, and in doing so broke one of the dishes.

"Never mind," said Rachel, in a voice like the chiming of sweet silver bells. "I know how sorry you must feel. The waiter who was here before you told me that whenever any of you broke anything the value of the article was deducted from your slender wages. I am sure you will be very careful next time. Please accept this to pay for the broken dish."

As she said the words, she handed him half-a-crown. He took it, making a low bow that quite puzzled Rachel, and slipped the silver piece into his breast pocket, which contained besides a few sovereigns.

Perhaps it was only fancy, but Rachel quite imagined that the polite young waiter paid more than ordinary attention to her; that he was to o

handsome, young, and debonaire to hold a position of that kind.

"I hope you will eat something, if it is ever so little, lady," he said, feelingly, arranging the repeat as temptingly before her as possible. "I think if you remain here awhile you will like this place."

"I cannot; I have little or no appetite," she answered, the beautiful young face raised to his, wearing a pleading, far-away look, which he could not fathom.

At that moment Rachel's eyes had caught the gleam of a bright, sparkling diamond ring on his finger, which, in his haste and excitement, Claude Eudon had quite forgotten to remove, and she grew uneasy.

A terrible suspicion crossed her mind that everything was not altogether right with the polite, well-bred attendant who was certainly trying his best to please her, and a strange sensation of indefinable fear throbbled at her heart.

While the obsequious waiter spoke these few words, Rachel gazed up at him with a strange, odd feeling in her mind. His clear, aristocratic tones reminded her so forcibly of one she was trying to forget, bringing back to her scorching heart all that happy brief past as freshly as though it was but yesterday that they had parted.

Suddenly Aunt Marion stepped to the table, and turning to the waiter, said with some asperity,—

"Young man, you may just leave the tray here, and I will call you when I need you. We can eat without you."

"Never mind, Marion," said Andrew, with a sly wink, which the good-natured soul believed no one could see but Marion, "it's his business fur to stan' there and see that she eats, and likewise to pass the milk an' the sugar and so on."

"But she says she can't eat," said Aunt Marion.

"Well, he has to stay there till she does."

"She will be obliged to send it back untested."

"You may as well take the tray back," said Rachel.

"Hold on, thar; we're paying for 'm; they'll have to be eat by somebody. Just you hold on, young man; I kin sit down an' fall to, an' what I can't finish Marion'll hev to."

"I'm 'fraid I can't, Andrew," she declared.

"I jest got up from a hearty dinner."

"But you'll hev to," he insisted; "it's bein' paid for, I tell ye."

Both Andrew and his wife were startled by a hearty laugh from the waiter. They were too much for the reliability of this handsome young millionaire fellow—this pair of rustics.

He pitied the young girl, she seemed so confused as she too listened to this dialogue. All unconscious of the amusement he was creating, Andrew sat down to the little table.

The chicken, the roast, and all the *entrées* disappeared rapidly. Even Aunt Marion felt her face growing red.

"One would think you hadn't had anything to eat for a week," she explained, apologetically.

"It's a great thing to be blessed with a good appetite," exclaimed the waiter, convulsed with laughter. "I'd give anything to be able to eat like thak."

"I'll bet if you had a few hard days' work up at my farm in Essex County, you'd know enough to stow away a dinner, I can tell you."

That night Mr. Eudon paced the floor of his room, and thought and thought.

"My suspicions were quite true," he mused: "that old farmer and his wife are keeping the girl a prisoner in that room. I can tell it by the terrified look in her eyes. I will rescue her the first opportunity that presents. I have never seen a young girl before who so completely captivated me. I have never seen a girl up to now that I could love—ay, adore. She must be mine. I will win her, earn her eternal gratitude by rescuing her. The poor girl does not dare say her soul is her own when they are about. It must be worked by strategy—ah! I have it! I will boldly carry off the maiden in the dead of night, and when she is beyond their power she may confess the wrong that is being inflicted upon her by these people."

The more he turned the matter over in his own mind the more he concluded that he had arrived at the proper conclusion. He would not make a confidant of any of his friends, lest they should be tempted to fall in love with the girl when they saw her.

She would be grateful to him; he would earn her eternal gratitude by his bravery. That would be the first step toward winning her. She would not be able to associate him with the waiter when she saw him in his own apparel. If by any chance she did, he could but tell the truth—that his infatuation for her caused him to act the part.

He built all kinds of air-castles, in which the lovely young girl was the central figure. He had heard them call her "Rachel," and he said to himself that it was the sweetest name he had ever heard, and surely the girl who bore it was the sweetest that he had ever beheld.

With Claude Eudon it was a new experience to be in love. It had been said of the Eudons that when they loved they loved so fiercely they could never brook a refusal.

Claude Eudon made up his mind that this girl and no other should be his bride.

Perhaps she had some lover from whom cruel parents were separating her. The very thought of it was hard to endure.

At this all-important time who should Andrew meet coming into the hotel from the early morning train but Paul Verrell. The meeting between the two men was extremely embarrassing to both.

Although Andrew felt very bitter toward the young man, still he could not somehow refuse the hand held out to him.

"You are the last person I ever expected to see here," said Paul. "How is your wife and—"

He could not utter the balance of the sentence; but Andrew knew that he meant to ask for Rachel. When he told him that she was away, and ill, it seemed to him that the very breath of life was leaving Paul's body.

"Take me to her, Andrew!" he cried. "I must see her! In Heaven's name, take me quickly to my darling!" Then he drew back with a start. "No, no; I cannot see her!" he cried; "it is Heaven's punishment for what I have done, that I—I cannot see her."

CHAPTER XVI.

HONEST Andrew drew back when Paul said he must go to Rachel.

"You ask me to take you to see Rachel," he said. "Now hear my answer, Paul Verrell; it was you who broke the girl's heart with your treachery."

"For Heaven's sake, do not say that!" cried Paul, "I cannot bear it!"

"I am saying only the truth," returned Andrew. "I would not let you see her, though you begged me on your knees to do so."

"Do not be so hard on me, Andrew," cried Paul; "I have suffered enough."

"Men who prove false to the young girls who love them should suffer," returned Uncle Andrew, grimly. "I want her to forget you."

"You are very cruel to me. Let me look upon her face for just one moment, and then I promise to go quietly away."

"You have known me long enough to know that my 'yea' means yea, and my 'nay' means nay," said Andrew, with dignity. "Go your way, young man, and find happiness if you can; but never attempt to see Rachel again, for I will not allow it."

All in vain Paul pleaded; Andrew was firm.

"She is not a girl to be cast off at will, with the expectation that you will be taken back to favour for the asking. No, sir; you cannot see Rachel. You can't argue the matter with me, for I won't listen to you. You'll have to go back to that other one you gave up Rachel for."

Paul's face had grown very white. It suddenly occurred to him that he had no right to see Rachel. If he were face to face with her, what could he say? he wondered.

It was hard; but, turning on his heel, he walked rapidly away.

Andrew looked after him, thoughtfully. It would never do to tell Rachel that he had seen Paul, for she would grieve after him. The more she saw of him, the harder it would be to learn the sad lesson of forgetfulness. The break would have to be made again, sooner or later, for the lover who deserts his sweetheart should never be trusted as a husband.

"My decision will make a bitter enemy of Paul for life," he thought. Still, he did not even mind that.

He kept his own counsel when he reached his apartments at the hotel.

He tried to be as jovial as usual during the remainder of that day; but Aunt Marion often found him looking about vacantly, with a strange expression on his face which she could not understand. She felt very uneasy when she retired to rest that night.

"I feel as though I could not sleep, Andrew," she said, wearily.

"Then don't keep disturbing me," he said, fretfully. "If there's anything in this world that I can't stand, it's loss of sleep."

"I know that, Andrew," she said, "and I'm not going to disturb you. I shall go into Rachel's room for a little while. I shall not wake her if she has already gone to sleep."

"Of course she's gone to sleep," said Andrew. "Didn't you hear that clock in thar strike one?"

"Perhaps she is not asleep," persisted Marion; "but I promise you, Andrew, that I will not awaken her if she is."

She had been in Rachel's apartment scarcely a moment ere a wild, piercing, terrified cry fell upon Andrew's ear.

"Oh, Andrew—Andrew, come here quick!" gasped his wife. "Rachel isn't here! The bed has not even been slept in! Just look there and see for yourself!"

"I thought I heard a strange sound about five minutes ago," said Andrew, springing out on to the floor.

"Some one has carried Rachel off!" shrieked Aunt Marion, wringing her hands. "Ring the bell! bring all the people around us and tell them what has happened. Quick—quick, for the love of Heaven! Every moment is precious!"

In less time than it takes to tell it almost every one in the hotel was aroused.

Andrew's story created the most intense excitement. All the porters about the place were quickly summoned.

One of them remembered seeing a lady and gentleman pass down the corridor toward the ladies' entrance but a few moments before.

He was called upon to open the door for them. He recollected the incident perfectly well, for the lady had fainted just as he opened the door for the couple, and the gentleman carried her to the cab in waiting.

"Aha! she was abducted, then!" cried a score or more of voices, while Aunt Marion wrung her hands and commenced to cry hysterically.

"The abductor has only a start of ten minutes," said the landlord, in agitation. "We will pursue and overtake him; have no fear, my good woman, I can promise that."

The coupé was hurriedly described. There were two horses attached to it, a grey and a bay. The porter did not have a good look at the man who carried the young lady down the corridor when she fainted, he was so busy reading a letter from his sweetheart which he had received that day. Indeed, he had not seen them pass him until he had been called upon to open the door.

The young lady was wrapped in a long cloak and wore a dark veil. All he saw of her was a very small and very white hand. The man wore a long dark spring overcoat turned up at the collar. His slouch hat was drawn down over his eyes.

He did not pay any further attention to the couple.

He had been in hotels so many years that nothing ever surprised him, unless it was very much out of the ordinary.

In an incredibly short space of time a score or more of men started out in pursuit, Andrew

accompanying the hotel proprietor, who had quickly hailed a passing cab.

"I think I saw just such a rig drive into the park," said the caddy, whipping up his horses.

"I'll give you two guineas if you overtake it," cried the proprietor.

"Ay, and I'll double it," said Andrew, huskily. "I'll earn the money, sir," replied the man, whipping up his horses.

He was quite as good as his word, for in a few moments he leaned down and whispered, excitedly: "There's the cab, just on ahead of us. It will be an easy matter to catch it, I reckon."

Then began a lively chase, the cabman did his utmost to overtake the other, and in the end the cab in which Andrew and the hotel proprietor were seated caught up with the other one.

In a trice Andrew had sprung from his own vehicle, and caught hold of the heads of the horses of the other cab.

"Now will you halt!" he cried, hoarsely; and the driver was obliged to stop his panting animals.

"Why didn't you stop when we called to you?" cried Mr. Davis, the landlord.

"The orders I had from the gent inside was to drive ahead," retorted the cabman, doggedly; "and we're supposed to take our orders from our fares. He said: 'You just drive ahead.'"

Mr. Davis did not stop to parley with him, but with a rapid movement flung open the door of the vehicle. A cry of intense anger fell from his lips. The opposite door of the cab was wide open, and through this the man had made his escape, leaving the unconscious girl behind him.

"Let him go now that we have found her," said Andrew.

"No!" cried Mr. Davis. "So dastardly an outrage cannot be perpetrated with impunity at my hotel! I shall follow the rascal and have him punished to the full extent of the law! Of course the fellow's object was to abduct the girl and hold her for a ransom. That sort of thing is becoming epidemic of late. A stop must be put to it at once. The miscreant will spend the next ten years in prison for this."

Andrew uttered no word, but he said to himself that he knew perfectly well who did this thing. It was certainly the work of Paul Verrell. When he had refused to let him see Rachel, Paul had taken desperate means to accomplish his object. Still, terrible as his action had been, Andrew could not bear the thought of giving up the lad to those merciless people who vowed they would make an example of him.

"I wish to heaven we had stayed on the farm!" he said, "we never had any trouble like this before."

He rubbed the girl's cold hands, crying out that he believed she was dead.

"No," said Mr. Davis, "her heart still beats. As soon as we reach the house we will call in the services of a physician, and he will quickly revive her. There are several doctors stopping at the hotel. You have no idea, have you, who would be likely to commit this outrage?" asked Mr. Davis, turning round and eyeing the old farmer.

"No," answered Andrew, huskily, mentally praying Heaven to forgive him for deliberately telling a falsehood, the first that he had ever willingly uttered.

The doctors who gathered round the young girl looked at one another with horror-stricken eyes as soon as they commenced to make their investigations. They appeared to think there was even a deeper mystery here than was at first supposed.

After a whispered consultation, one of the physicians called the proprietor aside, and said: "I must tell you of a startling discovery we have made, Mr. Davis. This is indeed a case for the criminal courts. We have found traces of poison upon the young girl! I should say that this was a very serious matter."

Andrew heard what the doctors had to say, and his face became livid.

"Do you know of any one who would profit by this young girl's death?" he was asked.

He thought of the will, then shook his head and answered, huskily:

"No!"

The doctors would not consent to keep the terrible intelligence from Marion, although Andrew begged them to do so.

"Your good lady may be able to throw some light on the matter," they said to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Aunt Marion heard the terrible discovery which the doctors had made, she went into hysterics.

"It must have been the man who abducted her," she cried. "Why did he wish to kill her, our beautiful darling, Andrew!" she cried. "There is something you have kept back. I see it in your face. Tell me at once, or I shall go mad!"

Then, when he had told her about Paul Verrell that morning, and how he had refused to allow him to see Rachel, she fairly held her breath in dismay.

"Let him be found," she cried, "and vengeance dealt out to him!"

Despite Andrew's whisper not to let people know about it until they had talked it over by themselves, Aunt Marion rushed wildly to where the doctors were standing in a group.

"I know who did it!" she cried. "Our poor darling had a lover, and he deserted her for a fairer girl."

With that she told them the story of the money that had been left Rachel, declaring that the deed must have been done to secure this fortune, and thus enable him to wed the other one.

"They searched the village, but they could find no trace of Paul Verrell. So great was the excitement, that a mob had gathered, and a hundred stalwart men declared that they would knock him down and kick his brains out."

It so happened that Paul had not gone to a hotel when he reached Seacombe. He had intended finding a person whom he knew before finding a place at which to stop.

It also happened that he met Andrew just as he was walking along. When he refused him the privilege of seeing Rachel, he turned suddenly around, and walked hastily away, with the bitterness of death in his heart.

He wanted to get away, anywhere—anywhere to be alone, to think what had best be done, for see Rachel he must.

There were always plenty of cabdrivers on the street waiting for passengers. Paul hailed one of these, and stepped inside the cab.

"Down to the sea," he said mechanically.

The hotel by the sea was so quiet, so cool, and inviting, that Paul concluded to remain there until the next morning, and keep the cab there.

Just as he was about to step in the vehicle the next day, a carriage dashed up, and from it sprang the very friend for whom he had intended to search. They caught sight of each other at the same moment.

"Dismiss your cab and step into my carriage at once," said his friend.

"My dear boy," said Paul, smiling gravely, "one would think something had occurred, you are so terribly agitated. I will dismiss the cab and drive back with you to the village, if you desire. But first you must stop and have a fish dinner with me."

"Man, man, how coolly you talk!" cried his friend. "Can it be possible you intend to return to the village in open daylight?"

Paul looked at his friend amusedly. It occurred to him that his friend had certainly been indulging in wine.

"Do you know that the whole town has turned out in search of you?"

"I expect it's a case of our dog and another," cried Paul. "No doubt, my dear fellow, you comprise the whole town that is searching for me."

"This is no subject for a joke," said Frank Dunstan, grasping him by the arm. "Didn't I tell you that the whole town is searching for you? Thank Heaven, I had the swiftest horse, and distanced them; that's all that saved you!"

Paul began to understand at last that something extraordinary had happened.

"Have you seen the morning paper, Paul, old boy?" he asked. "There is a notice out, offering a reward of a thousand pounds for your capture!"

He produced it from his pocket, and when Paul saw the head-lines, the bitterest cry that ever was heard fell from his lips.

"Great Heaven! am I mad or dreaming! Does this say that I am wanted for the abduction of Rachel Hilton, whom I attempted to poison?"

"That's what it reads," returned his friend, laying one hand on his shoulder; "and let me tell you, Verrell, I believe you to be innocent. We were college chums together. I have faith in you, believe me!"

"Tried to poison Rachel Hilton!" he muttered, as if he could not grasp the thought. "I—who love her so! How could they think I would harm one hair of her head?"

Then the rest of the sentence came upon him with crushing force; Rachel had been abducted! No, no, it could not be!

There was some terrible mistake somewhere.

As he stood there, the words of Daphne seemed to float past him on the breeze:—

"Mark my words, I will kill Rachel Hilton for coming between me and a fortune!"

The thought of the awful threat changed his face awfully.

In that one moment Frank Dunstan almost altered his opinion about his friend's innocence, there was such a look on his features.

Perhaps there might be some mistake, Paul thought to himself. He could not accuse the girl who bore his name, without some proof.

"Come," cried his friend, "you may be ever so innocent, yet a howling mob will not take time to listen to explanations. For your own sake, come away quickly with me until the excitement is over."

"But I must find the girl!" cried Paul, in agony.

"She has already been found," said Dunstan, seeing that his friend was too excited to read the paper. "She is in the care of her relatives in the hotel. In their excitement they may have made the mistake that poison had been given her, but upon investigation they will find that it is only a powerful drug that has been given her."

Paul gave a sigh of unutterable relief.

"Ah! surely it must prove that way!" he cried. "I would go mad if I thought it would be anything else!"

He could not find the heart to tell his friend of that fatal marriage which had had such a speedy termination.

"Come with me!" exclaimed his friend, fairly dragging him to the vehicle.

"No, no!" cried Paul; "it is my duty to face them like a man!"

"Have I not explained to you that you will be attacked by the mob that is hunting you down? Be guided by me, Paul, do not think of facing these people until the excitement has blown over, at least for a day or so. Then I will not attempt to dissuade you if you wish to make your whereabouts known. Be wise, my friend Paul," he repeated, "and come with me quickly."

He caught him again by main force, and before Paul could utter a word, his friend had hurried him into the vehicle, caught up the reins, and in a trice they were off.

"I own a little place up here in the country," said Dunstan—"a few acres, which a deaf mute looks after for me. No one will ever discover you there."

After an hour's hard driving, they brought up at their destination—a small farm, with a little weather-beaten house set well back from the road.

He explained by signs to the old man, who came hobbling to the door, that his companion was his guest, and that he was to remain until he returned for him.

"I will drive out here every evening and let you know what is going on, and bring you the daily papers. Take my advice and keep inside the house, for if you go out in the grounds a

party of men might drive by at any moment, as this is on the main road, and you don't know what may happen."

"I will be guided entirely by your advice until—until the time comes when I can make known my innocence," said Paul Verrell.

Wringing each other's hands, they parted; Dunstan riding rapidly down the road in the direction of the village.

With the notice in his hand, which his friend had left, he tried to read; but in vain. It seemed to him that trouble after trouble had followed him of late. Penniless, searching for a place to commence life anew, bound to one whose very memory he abhorred, now that the scales of fascination had dropped from his eyes; and last, but not most horrible of all, accused of harming sweet Rachel, the lovely young girl whom he would lay down his life to save from one hour of pain.

It seemed almost incredible to him. When he regained composure he sat down and read the article carefully through, growing white to the lips.

Meanwhile, the doctors were working with might and main over Rachel. It was a grave question whether or not they would be able to baffle the disease which had gained such remarkable headway.

Yet despite their efforts, the girl finally took a relapse, and was slowly sinking.

"I cannot understand it!" exclaimed one of the doctors. "The more I look into it, the more puzzled I become. It is my opinion that she will not recover."

At that moment Rachel slowly opened her dark eyes, and her lips moved slightly.

"She is talking to some one," said one of the doctors, bending over her. "She is calling Paul."

"Ah!" cried Marion, in a terrible rage. "We were right; it was *he* who abducted her. This is proof enough."

After this the search was pushed more vigorously than ever.

It was only a question of time now until he was found.

There was one man in the hotel with them who listened with bated breath to all that transpired, yet dared not utter a single word, and that was Claude Endon. He had made a bold attempt to take Rachel away. When he found he was being pursued, he sprang from the coach, and bent an ignominious retreat.

His amazement knew no bounds when he heard the report of the doctors—that poison had been given to the girl. He thought it was an untruth—that they were merely getting up a sensation—and he longed to tell them so. But he must keep silent for his own sake. He wondered who this Paul Verrell was whom they suspected. Could it be that Rachel had a lover? The bare possibility of such a thing filled the young man with dismay.

(To be continued.)

EXPERIMENTS have been made in Australia in order to test the likelihood of a balloon being hit when fired at. A captive balloon, at an altitude of 4,265 feet, was fired at from a distance of 4,400 yards, and was struck nine times without being brought down.

It is an interesting fact that, at a spot in the Rhondda Valley, in South Wales, a jet of gas may be seen burning under the surface of a spring of water. The gas is believed to escape from the coal mines which are so numerous in that locality, and it is a purely natural phenomenon.

ONE of the ancient customs connected with Swedish funerals was to place a small looking-glass in the coffin of an unmarried female, so that when the last trump sounds she might be able to arrange her tresses. It was the practice for Scandinavian maidens to wear their hair flowing loosely, while the matrons wore it bound about the head and generally covered with some form of cap. Hence the unmarried woman was imagined as awakening at the judgment day with more untidy locks than her wedded sisters and more in need of a glass.

A BRAVE ATONEMENT.

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(Continued from page 249.)

CHAPTER VII.

PHILIP MARGRAVE'S revengeful act proved a blessing in disguise to Archie Lawrence, thus defeating the intentions of the man who entertained such a rooted dislike towards him, and who had done his best or his worst to injure him when he mutilated the picture upon which the painter's hopes of fame and success chiefly rested.

It is true that a brief but severe illness had followed close upon that exciting scene in Lawrence's studio; but the painter was young and strong, he struggled back to life and health again; and, meanwhile, his friends had not been idle.

They had received an account of the affair from Margaret's own lips, given without any reservation, and their indignation at such a piece of heartless vandalism and unrelenting hatred had taken a practical form.

Out of a delicate consideration for Margaret they would not allow the actual motive for Philip Margrave's deed to transpire, but the story of the deed itself was freely circulated.

The society journals got hold of it, and tried with the earnestness of a private detective to obtain a "clue" upon which to build up a romantic narrative for the enjoyment of their readers.

Failing this, they threw out mysterious hints and guesses, which answered the purpose nearly as well; and as Philip Margrave happened to be a somewhat prominent member of society these paragraphs caused him considerable annoyance.

Archie Lawrence, and his works too, had never attracted so much notice before. "The talented artist whose masterpiece had for some unknown cause been thus recklessly destroyed by a well-known Barone," became by a freak of society one of the lions of the day.

People of rank and fashion now found their way to Myrtle Cottage who had never even heard of Archie's existence before. He received several commissions before he was sufficiently recovered to execute them, and a picture of his, sent to the Academy in place of the one destroyed, was accepted and hung on the line.

This realisation of a long-cherished desire, together with the favourable notices that followed it, served to imbue him with fresh hope and courage, and in a great measure to console him for his lost work. He felt that he had it in him to paint other pictures quite equal in power and beauty to the "Hector and Andromache"—the fragments of which had been carefully put out of sight by Margaret during his illness. He had at length obtained a fair share of notice; the world of art looked favourably upon what he had already produced; his pictures no longer remained for months upon his hands if they failed to suit the dealers; and with fortune thus smiling upon him, he had but to work steadily on in order to increase the reputation that his great talent and the romantic incident connected with his artistic career had gained for him.

And while all these things were occurring at Richmond, Leah was engaged in earning her own share of laurels on the stage. Already a public favourite, she bade fair to become one of the most popular actresses of the day. Andrew Ashmead could afford to pick and choose among the many tempting offers from London and provincial managers that he received on her behalf.

But, in spite of her success and the money it brought her, Leah's heart was no longer in her profession. She acted well from a sense of responsibility and a natural desire to please, although the keen enjoyment in delineating character and winning applause that had once been hers, had deserted her altogether.

The aim that had formerly given interest and colour to her life no longer existed. Philip Margrave had rendered himself unworthy of her love; she had sent him away from her, and refused to entertain the idea of ever becoming his wife. It was for the sake of gaining his love that she had valued fame so highly and worked so hard to

obtain it. Now that he was lost to her beyond all hope of recall the applause of the whole world would have failed to afford her lasting pleasure.

She had banished him from her presence; but she could not prevent herself from loving him as well as ever, in spite of the evil qualities he had displayed. There were times when she taxed herself with having been unnecessarily harsh and unmerciful, in sending him away without so much as one kind or forgiving word.

Archie Lawrence's good fortune rather tended to increase this feeling, since it proved that Philip had not inflicted any lasting injury upon him. Leah began to think more tenderly of the culprit, and to adopt a relenting mood; but Philip, unfortunately, was not at hand to take advantage of this change in his favour.

Finding that society, after the part he had taken in the Lawrence affair became generally known, was very much inclined to give him the cold shoulder, he had left England in a rage and started for the Continent.

Thus with no settled purpose in view, with only an unfortunate love affair to sadden the past and darken the future, Leah worked on with smiling lips and aching heart, wondering sometimes at the barrenness and desolation that characterised her inner life as she did so.

She spent a great deal of her spare time at Myrtle Cottage with the Lawrences. But no allusion to Philip Margrave ever passed between them. He was tacitly ignored, and Leah's acquaintance with him remained a profound secret to her nearest relatives.

At the end of a long fatiguing season the young actress was ordered by her physician to go abroad, in search of the rest and change of air that she greatly needed. Archie Lawrence and his wife being about to start for Southern Italy, Leah decided to go with them; and the little party, accompanied by nurse and child, crossed the silver streak, and, without stopping at Boulogne, went straight through to Paris.

A strange thrill shot through Leah's heart as, on turning over the leaves of the visitors' book at the hotel where they had arranged to pass the night, she read the name of Sir Philip Margrave in large, bold handwriting, that had been very familiar to her in the past.

"How strange that *he* should be staying here, at the present moment," she reflected wistfully. "Well, it does not matter much, since we leave by an early train in the morning, and I am not likely to encounter Sir Philip in the meantime."

But a most inconsistent longing to see her lover again crossed her mind at this moment, and spoilt all the beauty of the previous reflection.

Little did she dream under what strangely altered circumstances their next meeting would take place!

Very early the next morning, when the tired travellers were sleeping soundly, an alarm of fire echoed through the great hotel, while the bell that hung in the court-yard rang loudly.

A number of visitors were staying in the hotel at the time, and the scene of confusion that ensued can only be realized by those who have witnessed a similar disaster.

Archie Lawrence carried his wife downstairs in his arms, while Leah followed close behind them.

The fire had gained a terrible hold previous to its being discovered, and the smoke would have stupefied them had not the *pompieri* assisted them in gaining the open air. Some of the other inmates had contrived to escape from the burning building, but the majority were collected at the upper windows calling piteously for help.

"I must go back to fetch the boy; stay here till I return," the painter said hurriedly, as he turned to depart; but a shrill scream from Margaret suddenly arrested him.

—To his horror he beheld the nurse and child appear at a side-window, round which the flames were playing fiercely.

"Oh, Heaven! my boy, I must, I will save him!" he cried frantically, as he rushed towards the principal entrance, now enveloped in flames. But strong hands held him back, and a voice said, authoritatively,—

"No one will be allowed to enter the burning building; all attempts at rescue must now be

made from the outside. Courage, monsieur, your child will yet be saved. See, they have reached him; they are bringing him down. Heaven grant the ladder may hold firm for five minutes longer!"

Archie Lawrence could never clearly remember what happened next. He knew that at the end of a brief but awful period of suspense a ringing cheer rent the air; and his boy was placed all uninjured in his arms, while the terrified nurse stood sobbing beside him. But in that time of general confusion he could not immediately discover to whom he was indebted for the preservation of his child.

He stayed nearly all night at the scene of the conflagration, doing what he could to assist in rescuing others; and day was dawning when, smoke-begrimed and weary, he rejoined his party at the neighbouring hotel, to which they had been conveyed.

"I cannot leave Paris until I have seen and thanked the man who saved our boy, Maggie," he remarked, as they sat at breakfast some hours later on. "I must go out presently and make some inquiries about him; he may prove to be one of the firemen."

"Pardon, monsieur, but you are mistaken!" interposed the lively son of Gaul who was in attendance upon them. "It was an English gentleman named Sir Philip Margrave who rescued your little son and several grown persons from the burning building. He was staying at the hotel now destroyed, and they brought him here after he had received the injury. He fell in bringing the last one down, the flames were full in his face, and *le pauvre homme* for the time being has completely lost his sight."

"Well," remarked the painter, when they were once more alone, breaking in upon the silent ban of astonishment that had fallen upon them all, "I am very grateful—very grateful to Sir Philip for having saved my child's life. At the same time I would rather have been under an obligation to any other man living. I hope that his injuries—Why, Leah, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

For Leah, her face buried in her hands, was sobbing violently.

"He has acted so nobly, so bravely," she said, brokenly, "and yet I sent him from me without one kind, hopeful word, believing him to be wholly bad because he had committed one wrong, revengeful deed. I was so young then, and I could not tell that unmixt good or evil are seldom to be met with in the world. Oh, Philip, poor Philip! and now you are blind and alone!"

Little by little the painter and his wife drew from her the story of her love for Philip Margrave, and the reason that had prompted her to refuse his offer of marriage.

Then Archie Lawrence took several undecided turns up and down the room, finally coming to a standstill in front of Leah.

"If you can find it in your heart to forgive him, to become his wife do so by all means," he said, gravely and kindly. "He did me a cruel injury when he destroyed my picture, but the events of last night have dispelled any resentment previously cherished against him either by Margaret or myself. Is it not so, little woman?"

"It is, indeed," Margaret replied, earnestly. "We can entertain no feeling save gratitude towards Philip Margrave now, whatever his past or present faults may be. Leah, darling, put pride on one side and pay him a visit. He is alone with only servants to care for him. Go to him, and when you have arrived at an understanding with each other Archie and I will thank him for saving our boy."

"I must go at once then, or I shall lose my courage," Leah said, as she rose from her seat with a look of wistful, yearning sorrow upon her lovely face. "I may meet with a repulse, for he was very angry when he left me, but for both our sakes I am willing to risk even that!"

Philip Margrave was leaning back in an easy chair, his injured eyes covered with a linen bandage, when Leah entered the private sitting-room that had been placed at his disposal by the manager of the hotel. He was feeling listless and weary, while the loss of his sight seemed more terrible to him than death itself.

He was not altogether a bad man. In spite of the revengeful bent of his disposition, he had plenty of personal courage; he could sympathise with anyone in distress, and he held the strings of his ample purse with a loose hand.

Even his love of retaliation did not extend beyond the object of dislike, and he would have rescued Lawrence's child all the same had he been aware of its parentage. Fortunately, the heavy stage villain, without one redeeming point, is seldom to be met with in real life!

"Philip!" she said, gently, "they told me I might come if I did not say or do anything to excite you, and after what has happened I could not stay away from you any longer!"

At the sound of the well-remembered voice he started up from his reclining attitude, while an expression of wonder and delight crossed his lips.

"Leah, can it really be you?" he cried. "Are you come to answer to my thoughts? They were dwelling upon you even as you spoke."

"I was staying at the hotel that has been destroyed," she replied, as she drew yet nearer to him. "I only heard of your injury, and the brave conduct that all Paris is talking about just now."

"It has cost me my sight," he said, sadly. "I am well punished for my wrong-doings in the past. It is kind of you, though, to come and see one whom you so greatly despise!"

"You are mistaken, I do not despise you," she rejoined, almost humbly. "It is an unusual confession for a woman to make, but I am sorry that I ever sent you from me—that I ventured to judge you so harshly, Philip. Were you to put that question to me again you would meet with a very different answer."

"Had you but told me this yesterday I could have believed it," said Philip Margrave, "but not now. Pity for a blind and helpless man alone has induced you to revoke your previous decision respecting our marriage; and nothing less than love from you could ever satisfy me, Leah!"

"Yes, pity for myself, even more than for you, has brought me here to acquaint you with my changed opinion, my wider views," she replied earnestly. "I have never known one happy hour since the day when I sent you from me. Oh, Philip, I am speaking the truth, I am, indeed."

"My darling, I cannot help believing you," he said, thankfully, a look of intense joy lighting up his pale, wan face as he spoke. "Your words carry conviction with them. Like an angel of mercy you have brightened the darkest hour that was ever my lot to spend. But ought I to allow you to sacrifice your fresh young life to such a useless, helpless loss as myself? The doctors say that it may be years before I regain my sight."

"And till that comes it will be my dearest privilege to care for you, and to anticipate all your wants," replied Leah, brightly. "Philip, my stage life is over. I shall write to papa Ashmead, and inform him that I have entered into an engagement of a domestic and matrimonial nature. Have you any other 'just cause or impediment' to bring forward against our marriage?"

"What will Lawrence say when he hears of it?" inquired Philip, doubtfully. "I cannot in reason expect him to feel friendly towards me."

"Not when you saved the life of his darling boy last night?" said Leah, quietly. "Lawrence and Margaret are both below, ready to forget the past, and to regard you only as the preserver of their child."

Apparently she got the best of the argument, for a quiet wedding took place next day at the British Embassy, the blind bridegroom being led forward by Archie Lawrence, who also gave the bride away.

Then Sir Philip and Lady Margrave returned to England, while the other members of the party, minus one of their number, resumed their interrupted journey to the sunny south.

[THE END.]

SOME TEST QUESTIONS

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What animal, the species now extinct, had the head of a lizard, teeth of a crocodile, body of a serpent, ribs of a chameleon, and paddles of a whale?

What great poem was sold to the publishers for 25?

What is the legend of the "Seven Sleepers?"

One of the world's great lakes is so deep, it reaches four hundred feet below the ocean's level: which is it?

What is meant by the "Golden Age" of a country?

When tinned goods are poisonous, what minute organism is present?

What is the source of alcohol?

Who was chosen apostle in the place of Judas Iscariot, and what is his badge in Medieval pictures?

What kind of fishes shoot insects with water-balls?

In several countries of the world it is customary for women to have several husbands; what is the custom called, and where practised?

How many editions of the Bible were published in the sixteenth century?

Of what is human blood composed?

How long can a man live without air, without food, without sleep, without water?

What is a woman's chance of marriage at various ages?

How can you detect contagious diseases in children?

What nineteen metals are worth more than gold?

How could you make invisible ink?

What Greek boy exclaimed, "My father will leave nothing for me to do," and afterwards opened to Europeans the road to India, and gave them the first glimpses of the magnificence and splendour which have dazzled and captivated their imagination for two thousand years?

According to a very ancient tradition, there existed a nation of strong-minded women, who suffered no man to remain among them, but marched to battle under the command of their queen; they killed or banished the boys, and brought up the girls for war. What were these women called?

A celebrated philosopher and teacher, when asked by the town magistrates what funeral honours he desired at his death, answered, "Give the boys a holiday every anniversary." Who was he?

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FACETIÆ.

HE: "Miss Dora, your lips are like ripe cherries." She: "Are you fond of cherries?"

CRIMAN (at G.P.O.): "How many persons do you seat in this bus?" Conductor: "Six men or three women on each side."

WIFE: "Wake up, there are thieves in the house!" Husband: "Go down and show them your new bonnet, and they won't waste any time in looking for money here."

"Why do you not eat your apple, Tommy?" "I'm waiting till Johnny Briggs comes along. Apples taste much better when there's some other kid to watch you eat 'em."

FRIEND: "Why didn't you ever marry?" Maiden Lady: "Because by the time my relations thought I was old enough to marry, the men thought I was too old."

MRS. TUBBS: "What! Is Mrs. Offmarried going to be led to the altar a third time?" Mr. Tubbs: "No, I fancy not. She ought to be able to find the way herself, by this time."

"How did you like the Wagner operas, Clara?" "I enjoyed them immensely. The person at the back of you who always hums an opera is silent when it comes to Wagner."

BABY ETHEL: "What was I crying about, mamma, when I went to sleep?" Mamma: "Because I would not let you have your new doll." Baby Ethel: "Oh, yes. Boo-hoo! boo-hoo!"

CLERK: "Lady in front caught stealing goods. What shall we do?" Proprietor of Shop: "How is she dressed?" Clerk: "Furs and diamonds." Proprietor: "Beg her pardon, and ask if we shall send the bill to her house."

PATIENT: "I say, doctor, can you tell me what the difference between the influenza and a cold really is?" Dr. Pillem (in confidential tones): "The doctor's fees. People don't call in a physician for a cold."

LITTLE BOY: "Tommy Jones's mother is awful good and kind to him." Mamma: "What has she done that is so thoughtful?" Little Boy: "Let him have measles just the day school began."

"I suppose," said Jolliboy to his friend, "that when your wife caught you flirting with Miss Gofast she was speechless with amazement?" "Oh, no, she wasn't!" said Talkerly. "You don't know my wife."

HE: "Supposing I were to place my arm around your waist and suddenly steal a kiss, would you be very angry with me?" She (shyly): "I might, that is, if—if it went no further than a supposition."

"MARRIA," "Yes, Tom." "MARRIA. I—ah—" "Yes, Tom." "MARRIA, do you—that is—" "Yes, Tom." "Oh, will you marry me?" "Yes, Tom. That is the fourth time I've said 'Yes.' I knew what you were driving at all the time."

"I SEE," said Mr. Jones, reading his paper, "that a man fell from the top of a 250 feet factory chimney yesterday." "Did it kill him?" placidly inquired Mrs. Jones. "Did it! Oh, no, no, no! But he complained for some time afterwards of a slight headache."

FATHER (whose wife has presented him with swine): "Tommy, you may stay home from school to-day, and to-morrow tell the teacher that you have two new brothers." "Wouldn't it be better to say I have only one new brother? Then I can stay home a day next week for the other one."

CUSTOMER (paying at restaurant counter): "That steak I ordered was a disgrace, sir! It wasn't fit for a dog to eat!" Proprietor: "Very sorry, sir. Pray send it back and have anything else you choose to order, sir." Customer: "Oh, it's too late now; I've eaten it all!"

THE rough-looking man who had been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for beating his wife drew his hand across his eyes. "If you send me to gaol for the little thing of this kind, your worship," he whimpered, "I'll never be able to maintain discipline in my family again!"

MISS HIGHFLIER: "Oh Mr. Sappy, how nice it was of you to name your new hunter after me! What is she like?" Young Sappy: "Well, she's a regular stunner, Miss Highflieger. Not much to look at, don't-cher-know, but very fast." And he cannot make out why she is so cool to him now.

"I HARDLY know whether to be angry with little Charley Tape-counter or not," said Miss Summermaid. "Why, dear!" asked Miss Ronygirl. "He said he could guess my age, and when I dared him to, he said he thought too much of me to do so before others."

"WOMEN are still pushing their way into every trade," said George. "That's so. I have just been discharged to make way for a woman," replied Jack. "You have? Well, well! What are you going to do now?" "I am trying to marry the woman."

MRS. STROGGMIND: "Men think they are good reasoners, and yet every man judges all women by his wife." Mr. S.: "Women don't reason that way." "I should say not." "No, indeed. Every woman judges her husband by the worst things she hears about other women's husbands."

MINER: "So you think of settling here?" Physician: "Yes, I thought of practising among you." Miner: "Look here, young man; there is a good opening for a young man who understands his business, but we don't want no practicing or experimenting—doctoring's what we want!"

MRS. BLINKERS: "What! Going away! Why!" Servant: "Please, mum, when I come yesterday, you gave me the keys to your trunks, and drawers, and chests, and jewel-boxes, to keep for you." "Yes, I did that to show that I trusted you. What's the matter?" "Thur don't one of 'em fit."

INQUIRING CHILD: "What is a connoisseur?" Father: "Did you notice that gentleman who was in here yesterday?" "Yes, father." "He is a connoisseur." "How do you know?" "By his actions." "Didn't he act like all the others who came in?" "No, indeed. All the others just looked around and went out. He bought a picture."

"I STOLED a woman's new two-guinea bonnet once," said the retired burglar, "but you can bet your life if ever I go into the business again I won't steal another one." "Did the woman run you down and get you imprisoned?" "Naw. But I took the thing home and gave it to me missis, and she never quit talking till I gets her a five-guinea dress to go with the bonnet. See!"

MISS GILLIOT: "There goes Professor Fox, the great scientist. I'd give a good deal to know what mighty problem he is thinking of now." Professor Fox (ruminating): "Let me see; I was to get three yards of tape, a pound of butter, order the coal, pay the butcher, and get some soothing syrup for the baby. I wish Mrs. Fox would attend to these matters herself."

SOME time back, the play of "Hamlet" was being performed at a provincial theatre. In a scene with Polonius, the crafty old courtier asks: "Do you know me, my lord?" The prince responds: "Excellent well, you are a fishmonger." On hearing this, an old woman in the pit stood up, and, shaking her fist, shouted excitedly, "Well, and supposing he is—that's better than play-actin', any day."

AN old Highland sergeant, in one of the Scottish regiments was going his rounds one night to see that all the lights were out in the barrack-rooms. Coming to a room where he thought he saw a light shining he roared out: "Put out that light there!" One of the men shouted back, "Man, it's the mune, sergeant." Nothearing very well, the sergeant cried, in return, "I dinna care a tacket what it is! Put it out!"

NEXDOOR: "What are you loading round town at this time of the night for?" Naybur: "Fraid to go home. Wife told me to be sure and remember something, and I've forgotten what it was!" Nexdoor: "It wasn't millinery or groceries, was it?" Naybur: "No." Nexdoor: "Baby food, tacks, or theatre tickets?" Naybur: "No, but I've just thought of it." Nexdoor: "What was it?" Naybur: "Why, she wanted me to remember to come home early."

THIS story is told of some visitors who were going through a county jail, under the escort of the chief warder, and came to a room in which three women were sewing. "Dear me," one of the visitors whispered, "what vicious-looking creatures! Pray what are they here for?" "Because they have no other home. This is our sitting-room, and they are my wife and two daughters," blandly responded the chief warder.

A WITTY poet, no longer living, being one day brought up to Bow-street for some nocturnal squabble, the following dialogue took place between him and the presiding magistrate: "How do you live, sir?" "Pretty well, sir, generally a joint and pudding at dinner." "I mean, sir, how do you get your bread?" "I beg your worship's pardon; sometimes at the bakers and sometimes at the chandler's shop." "You may be as witty as you please, sir," retorted the magistrate; "but I mean simply to ask you how do you do?" "Tolerably well, I thank your worship; I hope your worship is well."

"I PROPOSED to Miss Gladys Beautifirl last night." "Ah! And she accepted you?" "Well, no-o-o, not exactly, but she came so near doing so that a great deal of the sting was taken out of her refusal. She said she would have accepted me if I had had plenty of money, and a perfect disposition, and my eyes were brown instead of blue, and my hair curly, and I was two inches taller, and was winning fame in my profession, and possessed personal magnetism, and came of an old and blue-blooded family, and would always let her have her own way, and never smoke nor want to stay out late at night, and did not belong to any lodge, and would keep a stylish turnout, and plenty of servants, and really wanted her mamma to live with us, and a few other things which I have forgotten. But if a fellow must fall in an undertaking, it is encouraging to him to think that he came very near winning."

THERE was once an English nobleman who told at a dinner of a tiger he shot. It measured twenty-four feet, he said, from snout to tail-tip. Everybody looked a bit astonished, but nobody insinuated disbelief in the story—nobody but an old Scotchman, who told a story of a fish he once caught. He had been unable to pull it in alone, but with the aid of six friends, he managed to land it. "It was a skate," he said, "and it covered two acres." The nobleman looked at the Scot through his monocle, and left the table. Others followed. After a while the host returned. "Sir," said he to the Scotchman, "you have insulted my lord, and you must apologise." "I didna insult him," said the Scot. "Yes, you did, with your two-acre fish story. You must apologise." "Weel," said the braw and wary Scot, "tell him if he'll take ten feet off that tiger, I'll see what I can do with the fish."

ALTHOUGH much is said of the impertinence of assistants in drapers' shops, there are many models of long-suffering politeness among them, and it was one of this large class to whose lips rose a rejoinder which even his diplomatic employer counted as excusable—if nothing better. Whenever a special sale of any line of goods was announced from the shop in question, there invariably appeared on the next morning a lady who insisted upon being shown every article on the shelves, but had never been known to purchase anything. The shop was not a large one, and it had fallen to the lot of one assistant in particular to wait upon this lady again and again. At last there came a day when a sale of blankets was announced. Early the next morning the lady appeared, and for nearly half an hour the patient assistant displayed blankets until they were heaped high before him. At last he announced that there were no more. "Oh, don't mind!" said the lady indifferently, taking up her hand-bag. "I was just looking for a friend here." "Madam," said the assistant, in a tone of perfect respect, "if you think there is any chance that your friend is among the blankets, I will go through them again." Undoubtedly the lady is still pursuing her search in other directions, but that one shop has known her no more since that day.

SOCIETY.

As January is the traditional "unlucky month" of Belgian Royalty, and Lent commences somewhat early, it has been decided that the marriage of the Princess Henriette and Prince Emmanuel d'Orléans is to take place in the early days of February. Since the Duc d'Orléans must be present, as chief of the "House of France," the question of "placing" him at the ceremony entails endless difficulties and complications, and the wedding is therefore to be as private as possible, and not even the Corps Diplomatique will receive invitations. The Count and Countess of Flanders will "present" their future son-in-law to the Foreign Ministers at a ball or reception which they will give for that purpose. After his marriage the Prince will assume the historic title of Duc de Vendôme.

It is stated that the Queen intends sojourning at Nice next March. Her Majesty would be glad to visit Cimiez again, but has stipulated that in this case the building of the Regina Palace shall be stopped during her stay. If this be not conceded Queen Victoria will choose her residence on the hill of Mount Boron. And in case such will be necessary, a villa is already being sought for in that direction. Each time that she has paid a visit to Cimiez she has derived much benefit from her stay, and it is a great delight both to her and to Princess Beatrice to sketch the beautiful scenery and visit the many places of interest in the neighbourhood. Moreover, the Queen has become accustomed to the place and to the people, whom she finds very simple, and, as she has frequently said, more like the Scotch than any other peasantry she knows. This goes a long way towards deciding her to once more spend the trying weeks of the very early spring in this pretty little place. Negotiations have already been set on foot with respect to the villa occupied last year by her Majesty, the grounds of which were secluded and very pretty.

The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse have gone on a visit to the Emperor and Empress of Russia at St. Petersburg, where they are staying for three weeks, returning to Germany in time to spend the Christmas holidays at Coburg.

THERE is to be a Council at Osborne about the middle of next month, when Parliament will be again prorogued until the date of meeting for despatch of business, which according to present arrangements, is to be Tuesday, February 4th.

THE Queen has offered the command of the *Victoria and Albert* to Prince Louis of Battenberg, as this coveted berth will be vacated in the spring by Rear-Admiral Fullerton, who has served on board the Royal yacht for many years past. If Prince Louis goes to the *Victoria and Albert*, then Princess Louisa is to have Osborne Cottage as a residence.

THE pet boudoir of the young Tsaritsa in the Palace of Zarskoje-Selo, fifteen miles from St. Petersburg, where the Grand Duchess Olga was christened, is a charming apartment of highly original aspect. The first impression is one of cheerful brightness, for the absence of curtains or blinds permits sun and air to enter freely. A slight drapery framing each window is all that is visible, and is sufficient to prevent any appearance of bareness. The great feature is the mass of greenery which meets the eye. Splendid palms and rarest plants are grouped together, dividing the room into bowers, and forming delightful nooks and corners, occupied by a cosy chair or two, and little tables for writing or work. The walls are panelled to a height of six feet or so with light wood, and are covered with photographs of persons and places dear to her Imperial Majesty. A recess contains a wide, low couch, almost hidden amidst huge palms and sweet-smelling shrubs in full flower, arranged with an artistic hand; the Empress personally directs the placing of each one, and often alters the position of the smaller plants, which she examines and tends with her own hands.

STATISTICS.

AUSTRALIA has a population of less than 5,000,000, but economists declare that it could support 100,000,000 with ease.

AN oak tree of the average size, with 700,000 leaves, lifts from the earth into the air about 123 tons of water during the five months it is in leaf.

IN proportion to the population, Italy shows the largest number of murders—13 to every 100,000 inhabitants. The relative number in Spain is 9, in Germany 1, in Great Britain 1.

IF the entire population of the world is considered to be 1,400,000,000, the brains of this number of human beings would weigh 1,922,712 tons, or as much as 96 ironclads of the ordinary size.

GEMS.

AN opportunity is like a pin in the sweepings, you catch sight of it just as it flies away from you, and gets buried again.

TRUTH itself becomes falsehood if it is presented in any other form than its right relations. There is no truth but the "whole truth."

MANY of our cares are but a morbid way of looking at our privileges. Remember also that contentment is more satisfying than exhalation.

HE that lacks good sense is unhappy in having learning, for he has thereby only more ways of exposing himself; and he that has sense knows that learning is not knowledge, but rather the art of using it.

IF we are in any degree damping the hopes, thwarting the plans and discouraging the endeavours of one who is struggling to make them fruitful, we may be very sure that we are fighting against the eternal principles of good. Even though the idea may be a mistaken one and the effort sure to fail, it is better and kinder to let it die a natural death than to stifle it prematurely.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHEESE SALAD.—Arrange some nice crisp lettuce leaves in a circle on a plate. On the top of each little pile put a small pat of cottage cheese and a hard-boiled egg. In serving, dish an egg, a pat of cheese and several lettuce leaves to each person, who should cut up and dress the salad with French dressing for himself.

CHEESE CROQUETTES.—Select a piece of English cheese and cut into pieces four inches long and one inch square. Season first with very little salt and red pepper, and then put in egg and bread-crumbs and fry in smoking hot fat and serve with cream sauce. These must be served as soon as fried, or they will become tough and hard.

SWEET OMELET.—Beat four eggs without separating. Add four tablespoonfuls of warm water and a teaspoonful of butter. Put into a frying-pan a piece of butter the size of a walnut; when hot, turn in the eggs, shake until set in the bottom, then, with a limber-knife, lift the edge, drain the soft part around and allow to run under. Dust with a very little salt and put in the centre four tablespoonfuls of jam. Fold over first one side, then the other, and turn on to a heated platter.

ALMOND CREAM CAKE.—Two cupfuls of powdered sugar, one of sweet milk, three of flour, one-fourth of a cup of butter, whites of four eggs, well beaten, and two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, and half a teaspoonful of vanilla. Bake in four tins and put together in layers, with cream made as follows:—Whip one cupful of cream to a froth and stir gradually into it half a cupful of powdered sugar, a few drops of vanilla and one pound of almonds, blanched and chopped. Spread thick between the layers. Frost the top and sides.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN China a woman may be divorced for talkativeness.

A BLIND bat avoids wires and obstructions as easily as if he could see perfectly.

A PRIVATE cycling track is being built for the German Emperor, who has now fallen a victim to the bicycling craze.

THE "dumb-piano" is a new invention, on which young ladies can practise without making any sound.

THEY have found out in California that peach-stones burn as well as coal and give out more heat. They sell at the rate of 12s. a ton.

IN Spain, women guard the railway crossings, and add to the picturesqueness of the scene as they wave flags of safety as the trains creep by.

IT is announced that the flying mouse is a recent discovery in the Cameroons country of Africa. It is a link between the bat and the true mouse.

A MATCH CUTTING machine is quite an automatic curiosity. It cuts 10,000,000 a day, and then arranges them over a vat, where the heads are put on at a surprising rate of speed.

STERIL has been used for shipbuilding only about thirty years; yet it is estimated that 96 per cent. of the vessels launched at the present time are built of it.

A NEAT little brush is attached to the tail of the glow-worm, and it is used to keep clean that part of the insect from which the light gleams, so as to make it more distinctly visible.

A SEAWEED of the South Pacific often grows to be 30 or 40 inches in diameter and 1,500 to 2,000 feet in length. It has no root in the proper sense, the nourishment being absorbed from the water.

ACETYLENE, the brilliant new gas, can be easily liquefied and stored until needed. When it is to be used, the pressure is lessened, and it becomes gaseous again. It gives more than ten times the light of coal gas burned in the best burners.

So penetrating is water at high pressure that only special qualities of cast-iron will withstand it. In the early days of the hydraulic jack it was no uncommon thing to see water issuing like a fine needle through the metal, and the water-noodle would penetrate the unwary finger as readily as a steel one.

WHEN travelling on a British railway you can tell how fast the train is going by the following method: The telegraph posts along a railway line are placed thirty to the mile. So if you multiply the number of posts passed in a minute by two, the result gives you the number of miles per hour at which the train is going.

A NEW method of decorating houses is most unique. A material has been discovered combined with a process, which is the inventor's secret, for completely hardening and, so to speak, petrifying natural flowers (and what is more wonderful, preserving their colours), and imbedding them flush into the surface of a kind of liquid marble or alabaster, the whole receiving several coatings of a transparent polishing substance, and drying hard as a rock.

THE greater number of the lions exhibited to the English public have been born and reared in travelling menageries or caravans. When very young the cubs are taken from the lioness and given to a collie, Newfoundland, or other canine foster-mother. As a rule, a woman looks after both nurse and cubs, the task usually falling to the lot of the mistress of the caravan. When born the lions are like young cats. The little family is usually accommodated in a corner of the caravan, or in the trainer's private apartment. In their infancy the young lions are treated just like kittens. When they are able to walk they have the run of the place, play about, and seem to look for and enjoy the tit-bits and caresses that are bestowed upon them. They recognize for a long time the authority, so to speak, of the foster-mother, and are obedient to her wishes, even after they have considerably outgrown her in size.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. C.—Perfectly legal and binding.

RUFUS.—Trade questions are never answered.

QUERY.—Such questions are never answered.

A CONSTANT READER.—No, a Hoosier is not required.

LUTHERELL.—It depends entirely on the conditions of the deed.

MAJORITY.—There is nothing to prevent such a marriage.

S. B.—You will find most of it in "Whittaker's Almanack."

Y. B.—The value is exactly what it will fetch. Take it to a dealer.

JOCKEY.—It is of Anglo-Saxon derivation, and means "all bright."

F. H.—Corks warmed in oil make excellent substitutes for glass stoppers.

OLD READER.—Order it through your bookseller, after ascertaining the price.

V. G.—You had better order it through your ironmonger. We do not give addresses.

CURIOUS.—The Grenadier Guards got their name from their original weapon—the hand grenade.

SOPHIE.—Keep them in a well-warmed room; water sparingly; never expose them to gas fumes.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—It is a very subtle drug, and we cannot recommend anyone to use it.

C. D.—A wife who leaves her husband without cause and against his consent has no claim upon him.

COOK.—They may be pricked with a fork and done whole when small, but are better sliced or cut in half.

HARRY.—Write to Crosby Lockwood and Co., Stationer's Hall-court, London—see book on engine driving.

MILLICENT.—Lay a thin slice of pork on the breast of each bird, and a piece of bread underneath. Roast in a hot oven.

F. B.—If the San or County Fire Offices have an agency in your town, you cannot do better than select one or the other.

ANTON.—Most people prefer sending such articles to the cleaners, who are skilled in various methods to suit all requirements.

AMBITION.—You could not procure a regular engagement at a theatre without having acquired some knowledge of treading the boards.

REGULAR READER.—To hang the clothes well spread out in the air when dry—the more wind the better—is the best of all remedies.

DISTRESSED.—It is not thought wise to interfere with onions unless they are small ones, when they may be removed by carbolic acid.

ETHEL B.—About twelve grains of anti-pyrim is to be taken on each of three days before sailing, and again on each of three days after sailing.

A. K.—As the first century began with the first year of the Christian era, the nineteenth century began of necessity on the 1st January, 1801.

INTERESTED.—Oculists say that the period during which people have the most trouble with their eyes is between twenty and thirty years of age.

Y. R.—It proceeds from a very active circulation, and is a sign of good health. There is no real remedy, but violet powder renewed as required dries the surface.

DISCONTENT.—We should certainly not advise you to emigrate unless you are capable of making yourself useful in other ways than that of literary occupation.

VERY DOUBTFUL.—It is very difficult to advise in such a case. We have known such courtships to end in very happy married lives, and we have known the reverse.

E. V. H.—For use as a mouth wash it is well to mix half and half glycerine, and keep closely corked. Pour a few drops into a glass of water, closing the bottle at once.

A DISPUTED POINT.—As the north is the top of the globe and the south the bottom, the correct geographical description of a journey is up north and down south.

C. S.—You cannot get your son off because he has joined under eighteen years of age, if he said he was over it and looks like it; that is the rule the War Office go upon.

M. W.—Constantly air the wardrobe well. Keep it dry, the damp attracts them, and in the spring and through the summer sprinkle well with pounded camphor and ground pepper.

KATIE.—Brush with a rather long-haired brush, always moving in the line of the pile, and follow with a soft silk handkerchief. Some persons always use a piece of crape for the second brushing.

S. C.—Dark colours concentrate heat rays, and light colours disperse them. Black, being the darkest, is therefore the warmest, and as white is the lightest colour, it is on the same theory cooler.

J. J. J.—Twenty-five years of age is not too old for a student to begin. Indeed, there is likely to be more mature judgment and a more thorough appreciation of the subject than among younger students.

FROST-BITTEN.—A simple treatment for frost bites is to rub the affected parts with the pure oil of peppermint. Do not use the essence of peppermint, for that is valueless for the purpose in view.

ELGAR.—Yes; Eleanor Aquitaine, Queen of France and afterward of England, survived her son, Richard, and lived to see him succeeded by one of her other sons, John, the signor of Magna Charta.

CAROLINE.—Half an ounce of seaweed thinly shaved off and dissolved in a breakfast saucer of spirits of turpentine is sometimes used. After it has been applied it should be well rubbed with a dry cloth.

OLIVIA.—Plants in hanging baskets may be kept moist by immersing the baskets in a tub of water for a few minutes, then taking them out and allowing them to drip before returning them to their accustomed places.

SCOTTIC.—Yes; there is a rock called Lot's Wife in the Pacific Ocean. It rises almost perpendicularly to the height of nearly three hundred feet. Latitude twenty-nine degrees, fifty minutes north; longitude, 149 degrees, twenty-three minutes east.

K. G. P.—Do not wet it. Brush the place well when perfectly dry, then rub with dry powdered starch mixed with stale bread crumbs, rub off and repeat. Dry bran is also used for the purpose. The brush must be clean and dry.

CONSTANT READER.—The safest expedient is to get a bit of pumice stone for one penny at a painter's; rub it smooth, then dip in water, and after clipping close rub the hairs down with the stone daily; this gradually splits and destroys them; not otherwise hurtful.

GREATER AND NOBLER.

I hold him great who for love's sake,
Can give with generous, earnest will;
Yet he who takes for love's sweet sake
I think I hold more generous still.

I bow before the noble mind
That freely some great wrong forgives;
Yet nobler is the one forgiven
Who bears that burden well, and lives.

It may be hard to gain, and still
To keep a lowly, steadfast heart;
Yet he who loses has to fill
A harder and a truer part.

Glorious it is to wear the crown
Of a deserved and pure success;
He who knows how to fall has won
A crown whose lustre is not less.

Great may be he who can command
And rule with just and tender sway;
Yet is diviner wisdom taught
Better by him who can obey.

Blessed are they who die for God,
And earn the martyr's crown of light;
Yet he who lives for God may be
A greater conqueror in his sight.

A. A. P.

VERY SEV.—Bashfulness when unaccompanied by clumsiness is by no means disagreeable to the fairer sex, and they will always be found foremost in assisting a modest young man out of any embarrassment their presence may occasion.

LOVELY.—It is better to be unpopular with the set you refer to than the reverse, if you have to make sacrifices of true delivery to be a favourite with those constituting it. A self-respecting young girl is sure to win in due time the respect of all whose favour is worth seeking.

A HAPPY PAIR.—While an engaged couple should not make themselves conspicuous "as such," we do not see why they should take extraordinary pains to keep the engagement a secret by endeavouring to appear utterly indifferent to each other in public, unless they have good reasons for such conduct.

LENA.—To clean ivory ornaments, if yellow or dusky looking, wash them well in white castile soap and water, with a small brush, to clean the carving, and place them while wet, in the sun. Wet them for two or three days, several times a day, with soapy water, still keeping them in the sun, then wash them again.

J. B.—It is important for every one who has symptoms of indigestion to see to it, that proper food is taken, and that no effort is spared to keep this portion of the system in good order. Most people know that certain dishes disagree with them, but lack the resolution to refrain from indulging in them.

N. C.—To preserve orange peel, throw the peels into cold water for twenty-four hours; then put them on to boil until very tender; next put them into syrup, and let them boil until they are clear, and the syrup is thick. To one pound of fruit, put one pound of sugar, or three-quarters of a pound if not wished very sweet. Only wet the sugar with water.

FRANCES.—Dissolve two pounds of alum in three quarts of water; let it remain till the alum is dissolved, then with a brush apply boiling hot to every joint and crevice in the place where insects infest; brush all the joints and crevices of bedsteads; keep it boiling whilst using; a strong boiling-hot tea of cayenne, used with a brush, is also a capital remedy.

ANNEETTE.—Boil a lot of vegetables in the boiler, potato skins or cabbage leaves. That does some good. Another way is to rub it thoroughly over with grease, then put soda and water in, and boil for a good while. When it is washed out rub it up very hard; but you may find that your only "cure" is to boil your clothes in a large bag. Sometimes it is found necessary, after filling the boiler with water, to throw in about sixpennyworth of vitrol, and leave it overnight, then clean out in the morning. The latter process is best for a new boiler.

GAUCHER.—There is no lack of subjects to converse upon in society; the trouble is with many the lack of ability to make their conversations attractive. If you would have influence in society, you must be able to render your remarks so interesting that you will soon become the object of general admiration. Therefore, cultivate your conversational powers to the full extent of your capacity, and if you have any experience in society's ways, instead of being a simple listener, you will be a much sought-after talker.

PUZZLED.—When one says of anything that it is "not worth a straw," one means to imply that it is worthless. The older saying was "not worth a rush," and this brings out the origin of the phrase. In the days before carpets it was the custom to strew the floor with rushes. When guests of rank were entertained, rushes, green, fresh, and sweet—were spread for them; but folk of lower degree had to be content with rushes that had already been used, while still humbler persons had none, as not even being worth a rush.

G. G.—Everybody should always breathe through the nose. The practice can be readily acquired, unless there be some very serious nasal impediment to overcome. Resolve to keep the lips closed when not talking, and in time it will be found as easy to breathe through the nose as through the mouth. Some persons, of both sexes, who have good teeth, persist in keeping their mouths open to show what a fine set they have, unmindful of the fact that they are swallowing the air through the mouth instead of breathing it through the nose, and thereby doing to themselves incalculable injury.

NASTA.—If it is caused merely from the pressure of the trimming, put a teakettle on the fire filled up no higher than where the spout enters the side. Keep the supply of water boiling up to that height so that the steam comes well out of the spout, and hold the right side of the fattened surface of the plush in the steam. As the fabric gets sufficiently moistened by the hot steam, lightly from time to time with a brush assist it to rise. This needs considerable care and judgment, but if well done all trace of a mark of this sort may be completely removed.

F. B.—It is said that in the year 1429 Gilles de Laval, Lord of Rais, was made Marshal of France. This man was noted for his debaucheries and crimes, among them the murder of many wives. He was very gallant, and as soon as one wife was disposed of went in search of another. So notorious did his conduct become that Charles Perrault, a French writer, published a story called "Bluebeard," in which he describes it under the guise of fiction. The story created quite a sensation, and attracted public attention to the man who furnished the principal character.

BETA.—Moisten three heaping teaspoonfuls of the best Bermuda arrowroot with a little cold water, and turn into a large cup of water that is boiling over the fire and in which two teaspoonfuls of granulated sugar have been dissolved. Stir until clear, and add one tablespoonful of brandy, or three of wine. Wet in cold water individual moulds or small cups, and pour in the liquid jelly and put in a cold place to harden. Serve with whipped cream. When wine cannot be used, in place of it take one teaspoonful of lemon juice. 2. To prepare a transparent jelly, soak one cup of tapioca in three cups of cold water overnight. In the morning put it in a double boiler with a cup of hot water, and let it simmer until perfectly clear, stirring often. Sweeten to taste, and flavour with the juice of half a lemon and two tablespoonfuls of wine. Pour into cups and set away until perfectly cold. Whipped cream and sugar may be served with this jelly. If preferred, a blanc-mange may be made with tapioca and milk by soaking a cup of tapioca in two cups of water overnight. Place over the fire in a double boiler the soaked tapioca, and stir into it two full cups of boiling milk, three tablespoonfuls of sugar, and a pinch of salt. Let it cook slowly fifteen minutes, stirring several times. Remove from the fire and flavour with wine or vanilla. Pour into individual moulds and set away to harden.

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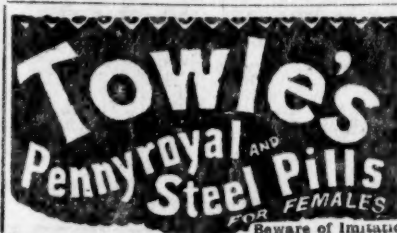
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